The #1 Computer Game Magazine

Computer Gaming World

THE NEW LOOK OF COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

The #1 Computer Game Magazine

ZD

APRIL 1996
NO.141

Red Baron Reborn

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Hottest Reviews This Month



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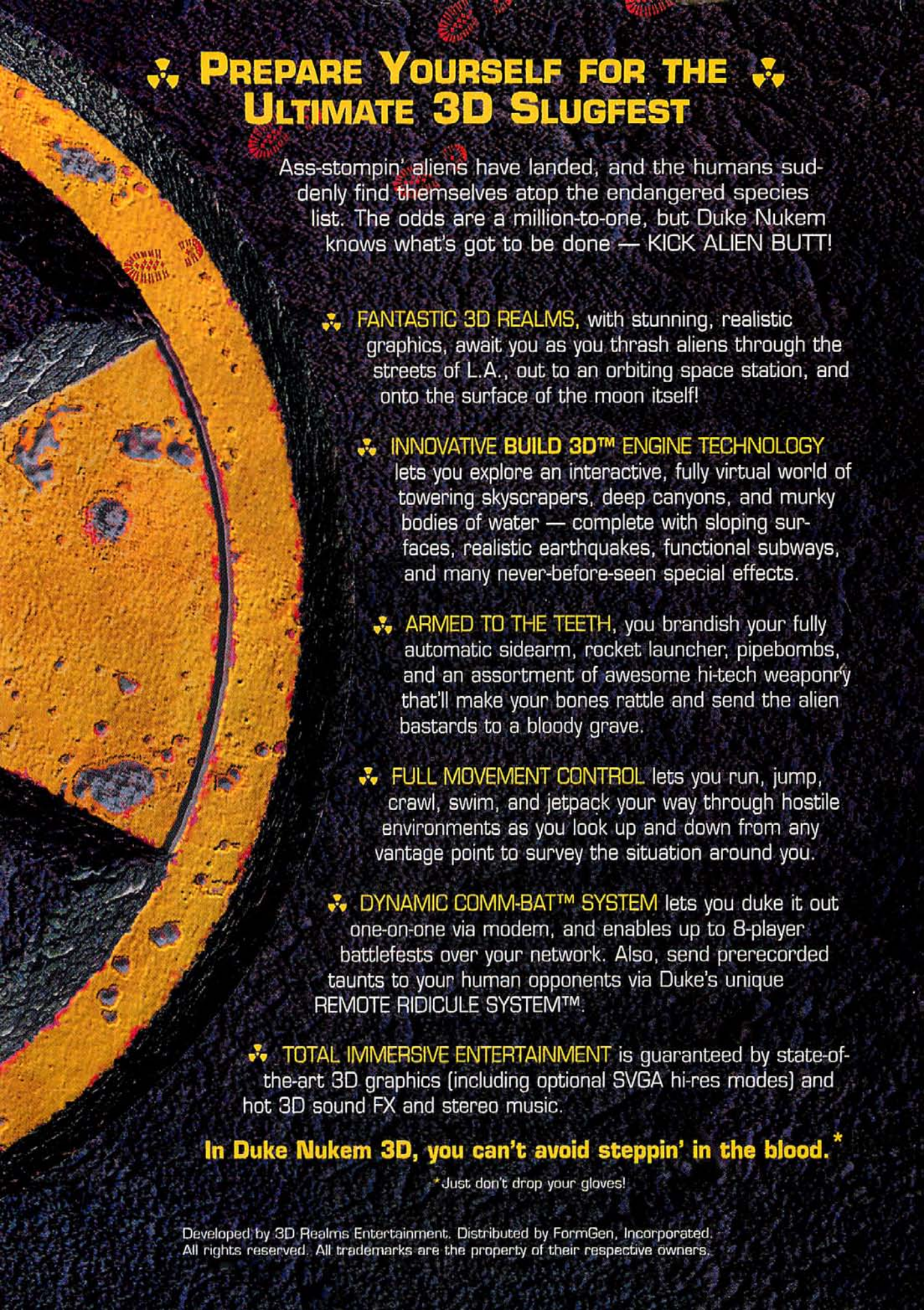
"Duke Nukem 3D truly looks like a 3D supermodel of a game: sleek, sexy, and gory with lead-thrashing action."
— Strategy Plus



"It makes pretty much every PC game we've ever seen - Doom included - look slightly dull. Honestly!"
— PC Gamer



"The Build engine's flexibility means that pretty much anything goes in Duke Nukem 3D."
— Edge Magazine



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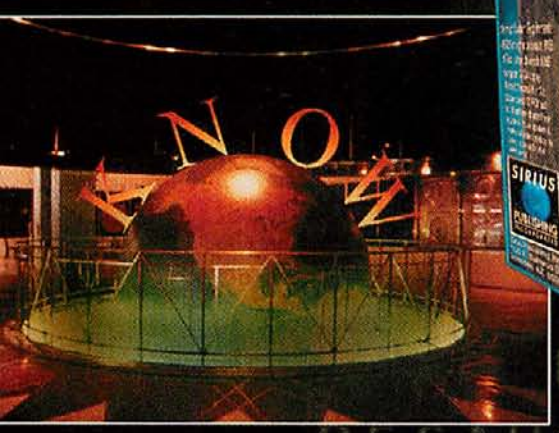
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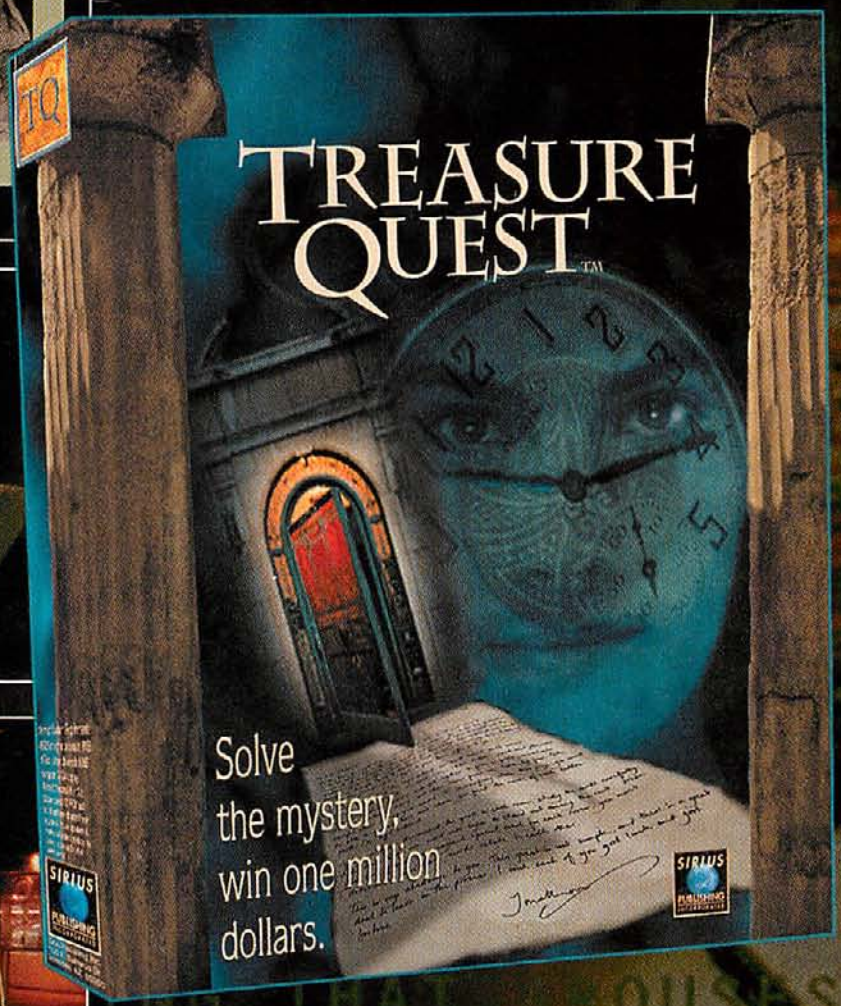
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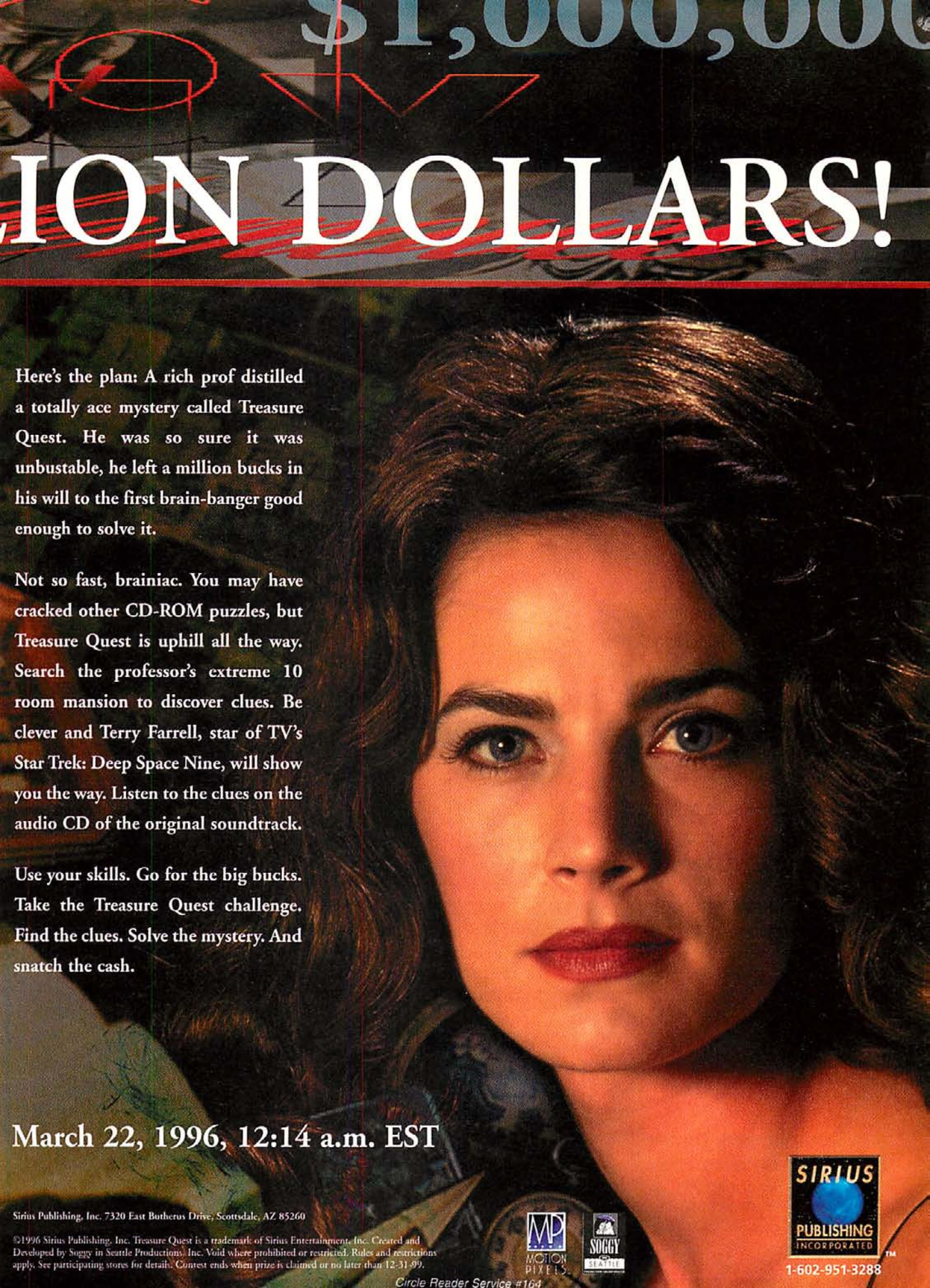






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FEATURES

52 Cover Story: Red Baron II

RED BARON still invokes the same awe among flight sim enthusiasts that the late Manfred von Richthofen had among his enemies. Now, with RED BARON II, Sierra's Dynamix team will offer magnificent graphics, a good variety of flyable planes, enhanced performance under Windows 95, and a sprinkling of new missions to round out the experience. Denny Atkin visits the "Skunkworks" at Dynamix, talks to FALCON 3.0 vet and RED BARON II designer Gary Stottlemyer, and flies his Pentium into the bullet-riddled skies of World War I to bring us the latest news.



58 The Grand Age Of Warfare

Many military history enthusiasts believe that the 19th century was the "Grand Age of Warfare." This was the latter age of fighting sail, the closing chapter of the Napoleonic Era, the emotional turmoil of the American Civil War, and the opening saga in the Spanish American War. Terry Coleman is your guide to existing and upcoming games that allow you to relive this pivotal age in military history.



72 Bonus Feature: Battleground: Gettysburg

Patrick Miller takes you over the familiar Pennsylvania battlefield with some pointers on improving the historical results.

78 Road Warriors: The Best Laptops

Until recently, gaming on the road was a dirty little secret, but with more powerful processors, color active-matrix screens, improved battery life, and CD-ROM drives available, that isn't true. On airlines, we're seeing more and more road warriors playing games on their laptops as they fly from appointment to appointment. So, our experts have narrowed the field and examined the best laptops to use for gaming on the road—just in case you want to come out of the closet.



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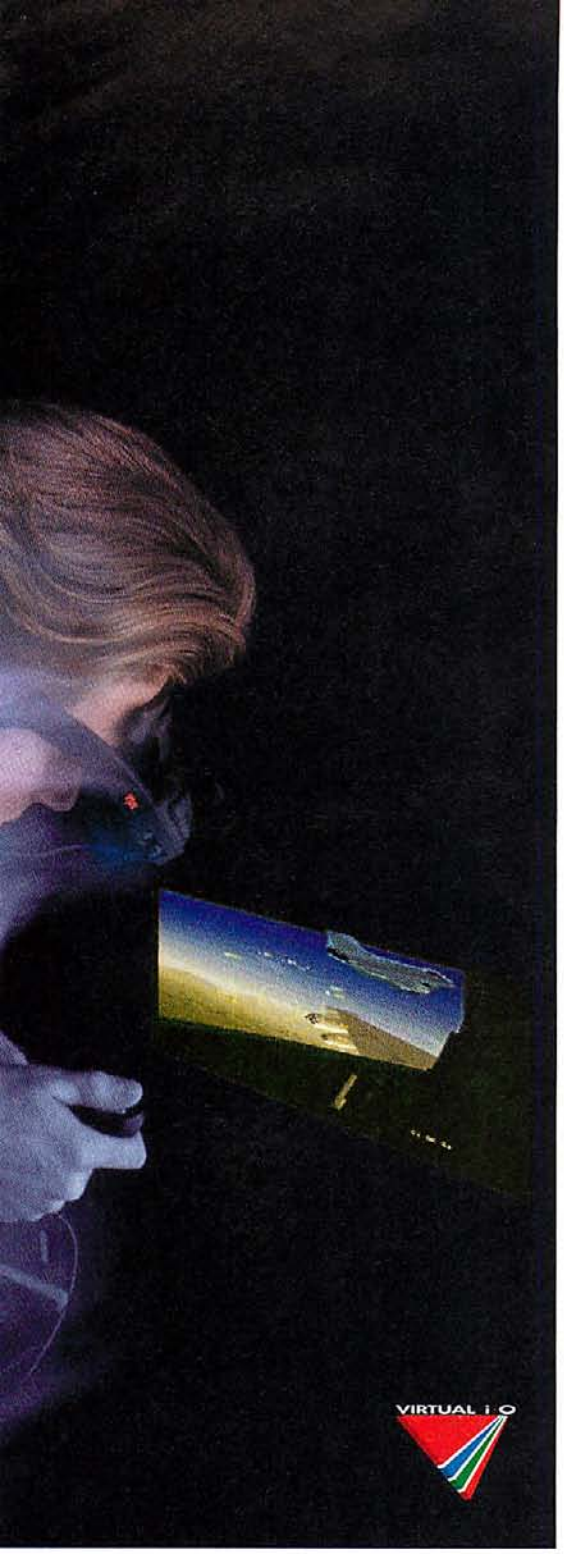




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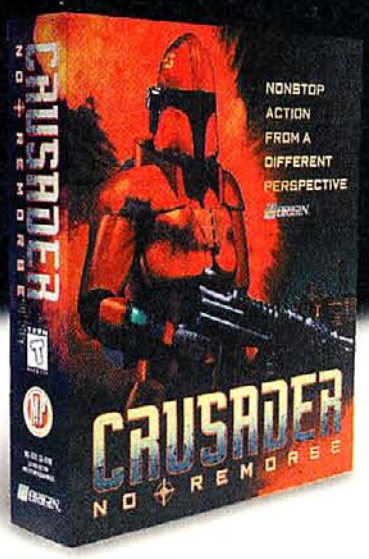
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CREDITS



Terry Coleman's fascination with the Civil War began when he was a baby, teething on a *Minie* ball excavated from Shiloh National Military Park. Years later, he wandered the fields of Gettysburg in a trance, reciting orders of battle and names of obscure officers. Terry played games of all types, but particularly enjoyed military games—especially those on the Civil War. It was only fitting, then, that he would begin his writing career by freelancing for *Strategy & Tactics* magazine. As the years passed, Terry wrote for publications as varied as *Fire & Movement, Berg's Review of Games,* and even *Dragon*. Finally, he landed at *Computer Gaming World*, where he has remained, often to the chagrin of many a wargame publisher. When not serving as Reviews Editor, or writing his wargame and puzzle/classic game columns, Terry still returns to his collection of over 400 board games, claiming that it's more social to blow up the world with a friend.



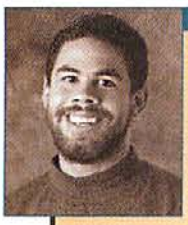
Patrick C. Miller's interest in wargames and pyrotechnics bloomed simultaneously in 1970, while he was still in high school. Using plastic models, he and his friends created battle scenarios and torched the loser's inanimate casualties in a grisly rite of high-stakes combat. It wasn't until college that he discovered wargaming could be civilized. He gave up his matches and flammable substances in exchange for historical miniatures wargaming, where war is less incendiary. After a 15-year apprenticeship in the hobby, he eventually graduated to the ranks of computer gamers in '86, where he enjoys flight simulations, strategy and action games as well as more "civilized" games.



Paul Schuytema is *CGW*'s columnist on Game Design & Technology. Known as the Scatman at *CGW* headquarters, Paul grew up playing all the classic games, from Dungeons & Dragons, to Squad Leader, to Wooden Ships & Iron Men. In 1977 he purchased the Radio Shack Model One, a then-state-of-the-art game system complete with an awesome 4 K of RAM and a cassette recorder for storing programs. He played high-school hooky during his senior year so he could learn to code 6502 assembly language on an Atari 800. After regaining his senses he returned to academia to pursue a career in science fiction writing. He now teaches creative writing and journalism at a small college in the cornfields of Illinois, and he can tell you for damn sure if something plays in Peoria or not.



Tim Carter was born and raised in a small town just outside Nowhere, Canada. He moved to Vancouver in 1986 to pursue his B.A. and M.A. in political science so he could practice the fine art of expounding the minutiae. Over the years he has shamelessly exploited this gift, emphasizing his graduate work on strategic planning to convince successive *CGW* editors to send him free stuff (strategy and wargames) as often as possible. During working hours he masquerades as the managing editor of *Recovery* magazine, a quarterly publication on medical, legal and traffic safety issues arising from automobile accidents.



George Jones, otherwise known as "action-boy," has been playing computer games since his first taste of Scott Adams' ADVENTURE for the Vic-20 at the tender age of 10. From that point until his hiring at *Computer Gaming World*, life was a constant justification for him. "Yes mom, I *can* make a living playing computer games," he cackles. When he's not sleeping on the mag's snazzy leather couch after gorging on Mexican food, he can be found on the basketball court trying to regain his long lost jumpshot or immersed in his John Coltrane collection.

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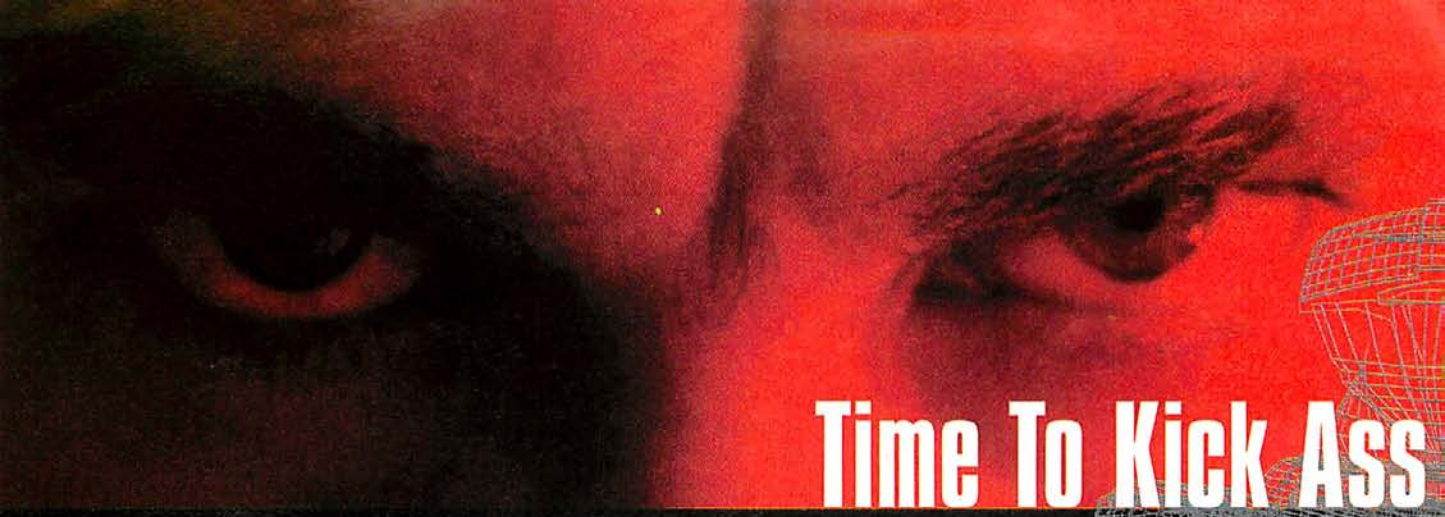
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These are answers to questions we frequently hear from our readers. Unfortunately, we are not able to answer the question, "Why doesn't the $#&*!! CD-ROM work on my computer?" because we don't approve of language like "$#&*!!"



What's On The CD?

In conjunction with the magazine's detailed look into 19th Century warfare, we have an interactive demo of SSI's upcoming AGE OF RIFLES, which may prove to be the PANZER GENERAL of 19th Century combat. For those enamored of the Age of Sail, we have an exclusive demo of the WOODEN SHIPS & IRON MEN game from Avalon Hill, complete with an illustrated tutorial. Civil War buffs can assault Missionary Ridge with a narrated companion piece to Patrick Miller's BATTLEGROUND: GETTYSBURG strategy article appearing in this issue. Plus, we have an overview of computer gaming alternatives for Civil War enthusiasts. Our Hot Picks this month feature the CONNECTIONS game from the Discovery Channel and a playable demo of one of the hottest games around right now, WARCRAFT II by Blizzard Entertainment. Also, look for our fourth installment of the Reality One comic strip, especially developed for *CGW*.

The "CG"-ROM is packed with action this month, featuring playable levels of PITFALL, RAYMAN, EARTHWORM JIM, GEARHEADS and EARTHSIEGE 2. We also have a teaser for REBEL ASSAULT II, LucasArts' sequel to the Star Wars game and TREASURE QUEST, the adventure game that pays to play from Sirius Publishing.



How Do I Use It?

Our CD is a Windows program. If you have Windows 95, installation is a breeze—our CD is Autoplay enabled. Just "Lock 'n load." Otherwise, boot your computer in Windows 3.x, pop the CD into your drive, select RUN from the Program Manager's menu and type D:\RUNME (where D is the letter of your CD-ROM drive) to run it straight from the CD, or type D:\INSTALL to create a Computer Gaming World program group on your Windows desktop. If you have installed previous versions of the CG-ROM, this disk will use the program group already on your desktop. You navigate by pointing and clicking just as you would in any other Windows program.

How Do I Get The Demo Files?

To access the demos, click on EDITORS' HOT PICKS, then click on the genre of your interest, then on the title you want to see. Each demo has instructions for its installation. Our Action category includes the demos: REBEL ASSAULT 2, PITFALL, EARTHWORM JIM, GEARHEADS, POWER SLAVE, BATTLE ARENA TOSHINDEN and RAYMAN; the Adventure genre has: INTO THE VOID and TREASURE QUEST; visit the Simulation section for demos on: ABSOLUTE ZERO, EARTHSIEGE II and SILENT THUNDER.

How Do I Get The Patch Files?

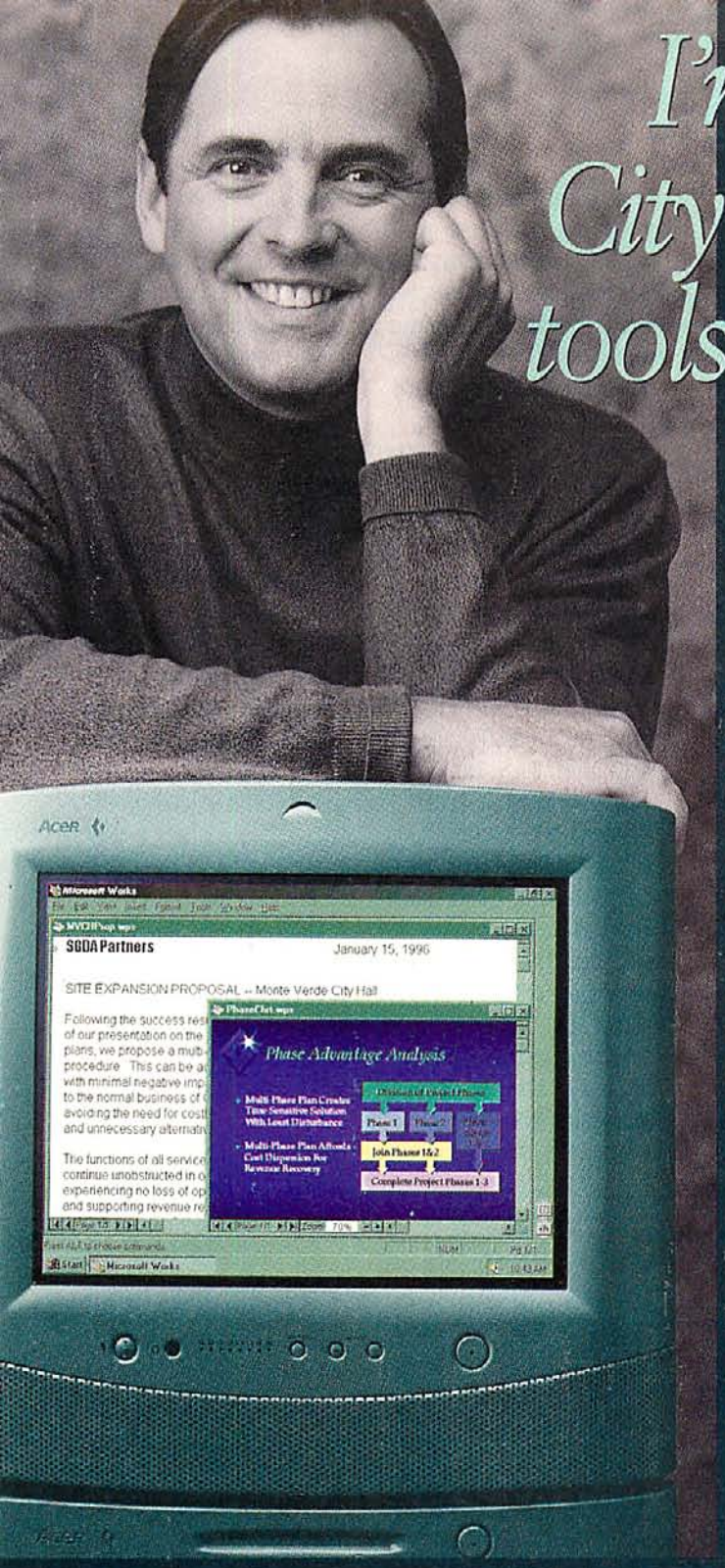
Click on PATCHES under the CGW FEATURES, then read the text window with instructions on copying the files to your hard drive. You also may access the patches from your DOS prompt by typing D:\patches (where D: is the letter of your CD-ROM drive) and copy them directly from there to your hard drive.

How Do I Get The CG-ROM?

Newsstand issues come in two varieties: some with and some without the CD. Each type is clearly marked—if you can't find the version you want in the store you frequent, encourage your retailer to carry it (or subscribe to ensure you get a copy every month). To subscribe, simply call 303-665-8930, and specify that you want the CD-ROM version.

Sukhoi Mission Delayed

The files mentioned last month in Robin Kim's Su-27 strategy guide (*CGW* #140, page 196) didn't make it onto last month's CG-ROM. We'd like to blame it on unreliable Soviet technology, but the truth is we goofed. The directory should contain two files, "ironhand.trk" and "ironhand.mis," which are needed to fly the custom mission mentioned in the article. Instead, it has updated versions of the missions that come with Su-27, a patch from SSI. We did upload the correct mission files to our Web site, the Game Center on Prodigy and the *CGW* Forum on ZiffNet/CompuServe. We apologize for the error, and we'll be sure to include these files on the May CD.



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How Do We Classify Games?

Action/Arcade (AC): The emphasis is on hand-eye coordination and reflexes, usually emphasizing fast play over story or strategy.

Adventure (AD): Games wherein you control an alter ego and move through a storyline or sequence of events, where puzzle-solving takes precedence over conversation and combat.

Classics/Puzzles (CP): Classics are old stand-bys and parlor games that appeal to many different types of gamer. Examples include: BACKGAMMON, bridge, chess, MONOPOLY, parchesi, RISK, and SOLITAIRE. Puzzle games are computer games which emphasize spatial relationships, word games and/or problem-solving without requiring gamers to follow a storyline. Examples would be: Shanghai, TETRIS and ZIG-ZAG.

Role-Playing (RP): RPGs are a subset of adventure games, but stress character development, often through improving stats or other attributes. Conversations with non-player characters (NPCs) and tactical combat are generally more important than in Adventure games. Finally, the game world tends to be large, and the plot less linear, often with some quests/treks outside the main storyline.

Simulations (SI): Highly realistic games from a first-person perspective: you may drive a realistically simulated race car, fly a military aircraft with a meticulous physics model, or swoop through a detailed sci-fi environment. Usually polygon-filled technology is used to build the simulated world on the fly.

Sports (SP): The sports game category is a broad genre which includes action (NBA Live) and strategy games (FRONT PAGE SPORTS FOOTBALL PRO) based on sports.

Strategy (ST): Problem-solving, short- and long-range planning are the keys here. These games almost always emphasize resource and risk management. This genre includes conflict-based sci-fi and fantasy games (X-COM, OUTPOST, MOO), as well as "pure" strategy games and "software toys" such as SIMCITY.

Wargames (WG): A subset of strategy games, these recreate historical conflicts from a command perspective. They may be tactical, operational, or strategic, and stress anything from logistics and firepower to morale and leadership. They may be simple (PANZER GENERAL, EMPIRE II) to incredibly detailed and complex (PACIFIC WAR).

What Is Our Reviews Policy?

1) We only review from the final copy of the game. Though it has become popular among PC gaming magazines to review from late beta copies, we feel that the reader is best served by having the reviewer look at the same copy of a game that the readers will find on the shelves. While we recognize that this causes some delay in coverage, we believe the reader is better served by such caution.

2) We expect our reviewers to finish the game. We want our readers to be assured that we do not review based on immediate or early impressions of a game. Our reviewers give a game ample opportunity to show its quality. In some cases, bugs make it impossible to finish a game, but we identify situations where that has occurred.

3) We make every effort to match the reviewer to the game. We take into consideration the preferences, background and possible biases of the reviewer and, where possible, we find people with actual life experience or special backgrounds that match a game. We believe this policy enhances both the credibility of the review and the enjoyment of gameplay when the real world and the game world are competently compared.

4) We do not accept free travel from software or hardware companies. We believe such gifts have a tacit assumption of coverage attached to them. We will only cover such events/launches as we believe will benefit our readers.

HOW DO WE RATE?



Outstanding: The rare game that gets it all right. The graphics, sound, and gameplay come together to form a Transcendent Gaming Experience. Our strongest buying recommendation.



Very Good: A high-quality game that succeeds in many areas. May have minor problems, but is still worth your time and money, especially if you're interested in the subject matter or genre.



Average: A mixed bag. Can be a game that reaches for the stars, but falls short in significant areas. Can also be a game that does what it does well, but lacks flair or originality.



Weak: A game with serious problems. Usually buggy, seriously lacking in play value, or just a poorly-conceived game design—and you will want to think long and hard before buying it.



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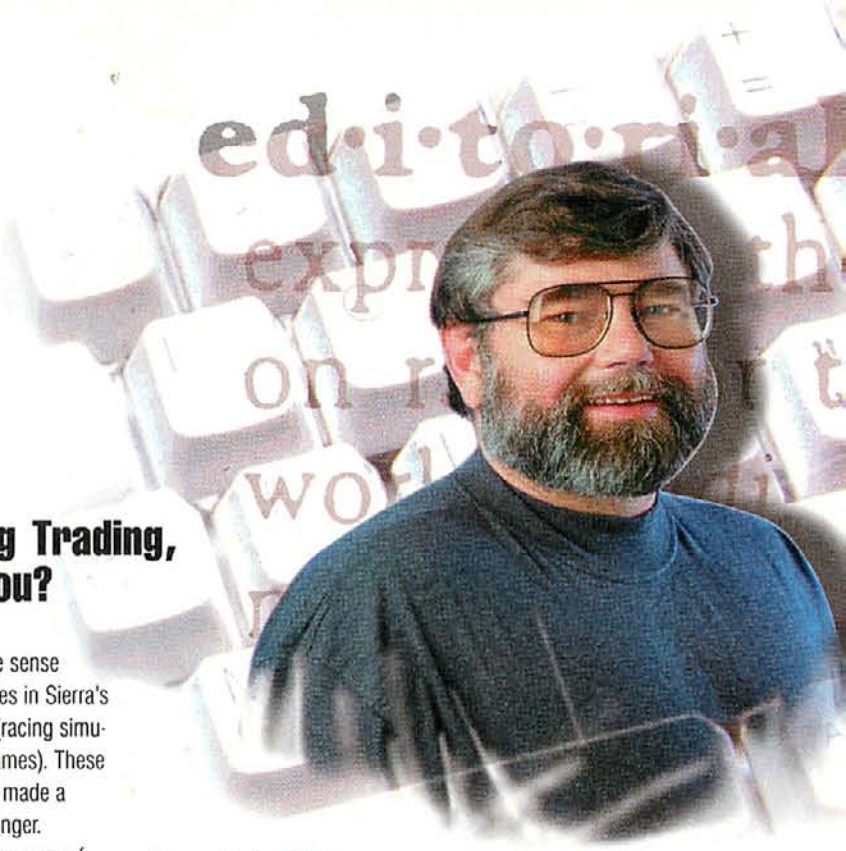
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Circle Reader Service #135

Merger-Mania



Game Companies Enter Spring Trading, But What Does It Mean To You?

I used to think of mergers as the Wall Street equivalent of those bad jokes we used to tell as kids. Question: "What do you get when you cross a hamster and a Macintosh?" Answer: "A faster processor." Oh, stop groaning. You get the idea. It always seemed like Wall Street's "Masters of the Universe" were actively trying to see how inefficiently they could combine dissimilar companies. What does Revlon have to do with Marvel Comics? Nothing anymore, but the cosmetics giant once owned the comic publisher.

By now, you all know that the computer game industry has had a lot of mergers and acquisitions in the last couple of months. At press time, Sierra was acquired by CUC International (see related story in READ.ME) and, in almost the same breath, CUC announced its intent to acquire Davidson (distributors of Blizzard Entertainment and one of the world's most successful educational software publishers).

Ironically, Sierra had been in acquisition mode prior to being acquired by CUC, having recently purchased both Papyrus (NASCAR Racing) and Impressions (Caesar II). Both Papyrus and Impressions were entrepreneurial companies with limited capital, proven technology and successful hits on their hands. The acquisitions also made sense because they filled holes in Sierra's existing product lines (racing simulations and strategy games). These acquisitions obviously made a strong Sierra even stronger.

So, it was with some sense of shock that we read that CUC International, predominately a retail company (Auto Advantage, Shopping Advantage), had purchased Sierra in a stock swap (1.225 shares of CUC common stock for each share of Sierra common stock). We were surprised because CUC's master plan envisions the creation of the next "killer app" for the Internet, and Sierra had already undergone tremendous pain from their launch of the multiplayer game network INN (formerly The Sierra Network).

To find out why, we talked with Sierra CEO Ken Williams. First, Ken reminded us that Walter Forbes III, Chairman of CUC, has been a Sierra board member for years. "Walter Forbes has been on our board for a long time and he's always dominated our board meetings. He's so dynamic and persuasive that if you had been watching our board meetings, you might have thought he was the Chairman of the Board instead of me. I hold the title, but he's the guy who's been driving us forward because I don't consider myself one of those Wall Street types. Before he was *unofficially* the boss, now he's *officially* the boss." Williams went on to say that 98 percent of his role at Sierra has always been concerned with product. He said that the acquisition will allow him to continue to concentrate on building the right mix of product.

> **"The immediate result of a merger is a reduction in the actual number of titles sent to market."**

I asked him about the future and he seemed extremely excited. "Every deal we've made," went the gospel according to Ken, "has enabled us to make better product. That's what's good about getting bigger." Asked for specifics, Williams observed that Sierra currently has about 50 development groups. "Every one of those 50 groups has the advantage of knowing about and having access to the cool things being done by the other 49 groups. When you build a new product, a portion of every dollar you put into development goes to technology and a certain amount to innovation. Being bigger means I have to invest less money into the basic technology and have more to invest in innovation. It's not how high you reach in a product that makes the difference, it's how high you were standing before you started reaching. That's what's making us better."

According to Williams, King's Quest VIII will build off 3-D technology improved in Red Baron II, object-oriented programming from The Incredible Machine and real-time character generation from another project in development at Sierra. So, Roberta Williams and her team will be able to concentrate on artificial character advances to move the company's flagship series to its highest level. Historically, the KQ series has been at the leading

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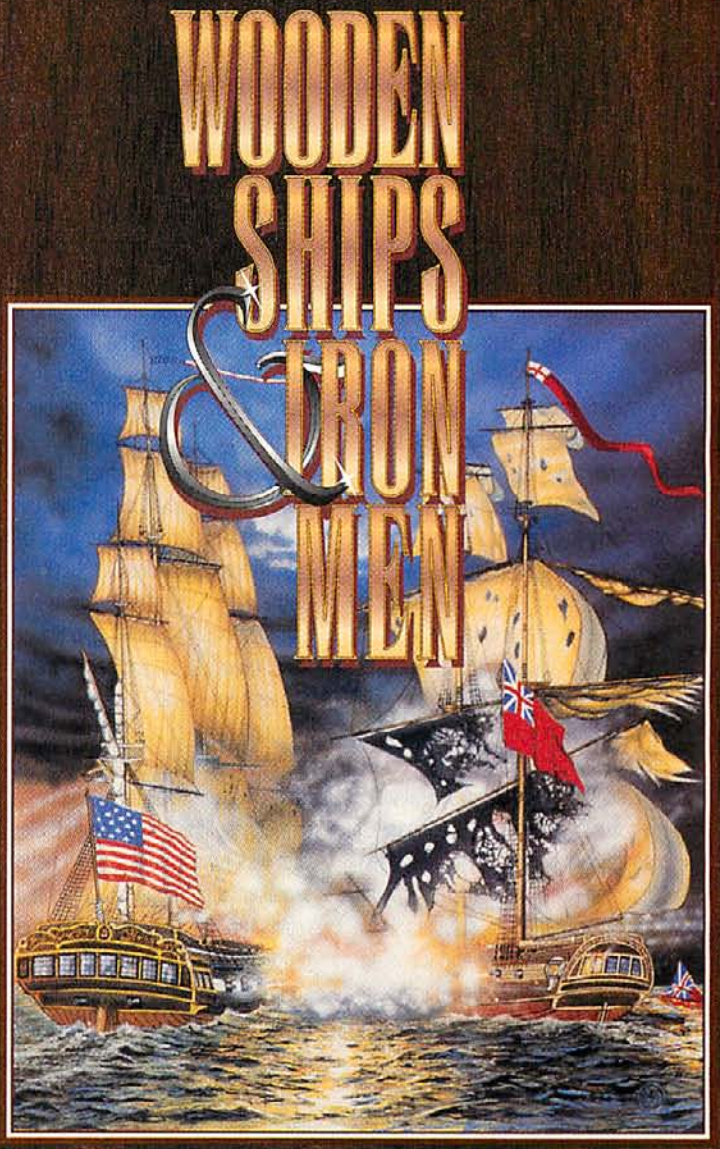
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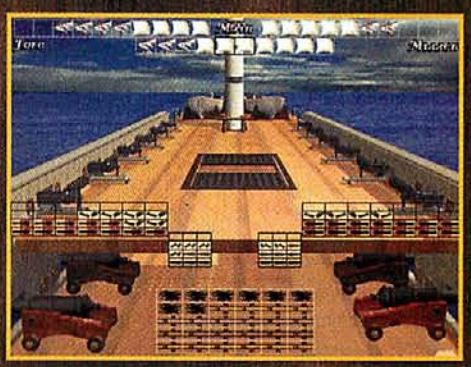
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Circle Reader Service #167

edge of Sierra's technology advances, and it sounds like KQ8 is no exception.

That's the presumed result at Sierra and a desirable outcome for the gamer. Yet, what happens to the market as a whole when mergers take place? The results are mixed and yield mixed results for the gamer.

First, the immediate result of a merger is a reduction in the actual number of titles sent to market. EA's purchase of Bullfrog has given the prolific British developer more breathing room and allowed them more time to properly finish games and get them to market. The financial "breathing room" may be an actual disincentive in terms of shipping products and may, as a result, actually reduce the number of titles on sale this year. But it could have the advantage of giving us more stable product. Mindscape's acquisition of SSI also reduced SSI's tendency to release so many different titles per year. Indeed, Mindscape itself is said to be limiting its number of titles by slashing its development schedule and focusing on fewer, hopefully better, games. Spectrum HoloByte's acquisition of MicroProse seemed to accomplish the same thing in its early days. Now, the east coast subsidiary has a reputation for releasing titles too soon in order to generate cash flow and keep things moving.

Second, the result of a merger is to change the management. It is rare when the same management team is retained for longer than a few months to a year's transition. This can be good when the strengths of the new management complement or supersede the strengths of the old management. Williams thinks the new management is better at handling some aspects of the business, and that their strength will complement his strengths at the product level. The new products from Impressions are already showing the benefit of Sierra's technology-sharing, and the latest products from SSI have certainly reaped the harvest of Mindscape's technology investment. These are positive changes.

Negative changes take place when management from outside a given field come into the operation and make assumptions without trying to learn from the past. The Hollywood invasion of the computer game industry and the toy company personnel who have come into our industry have had less than sterling success, even when big money corporations like Time-Warner have taken over fringe operations like Atari Games and Tengen. The new management has to be willing to learn from the acquired company's past.

Third, the result of mergers is to consolidate the market. For a while, there should be less "noise" and distraction at the retail level. As consumers, we'll become comfortable with less brand names; see a better representation of the total market at retail; and perhaps, see an eventual drop in prices. The last point may sound too Pollyanna-ish, but if the merged companies attain any kind of efficiency and if the larger companies in a more consolidated market don't have to pay as much to get into retail shelf space, it COULD happen. At the very least, the merger mania taking place may ensure that real prices don't increase, just as the reduced cost of goods brought about via CDs has kept the basic price of computer games around $60 for over two years.

So, what are we to make of the current merger mania? It reduces the chances of the one-or two-man shop to come in with a megahit and sweep the industry, but it probably keeps the industry healthy in the long run. A healthy industry will keep up the flow of good games, and as long as there are good games to play, most of us will be happy.

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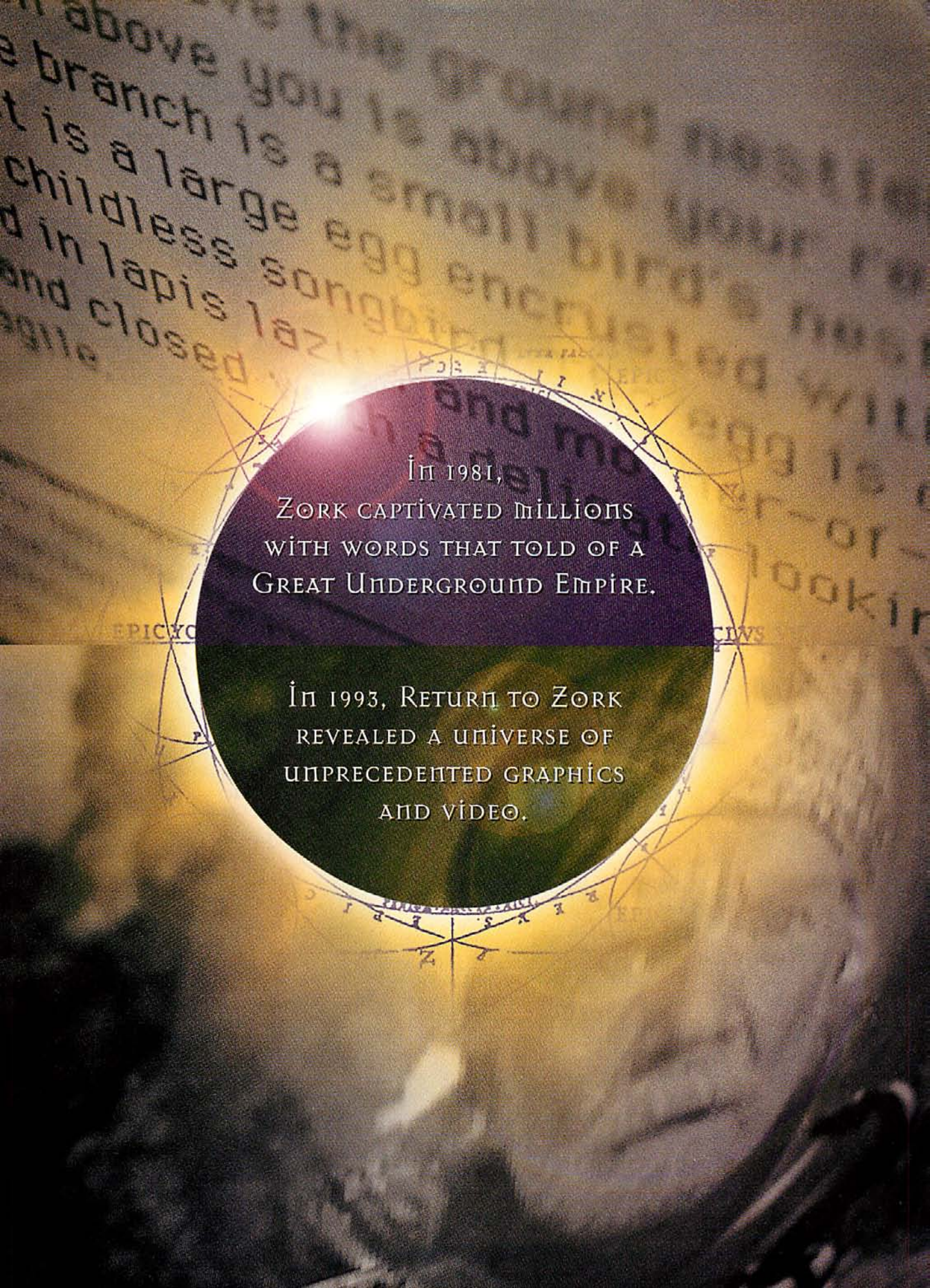
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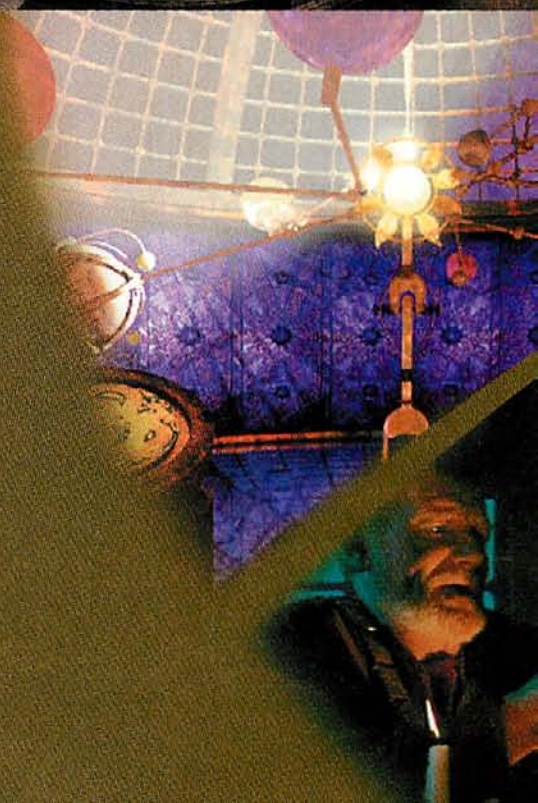
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LETTER OF THE MONTH

YOU'VE GOT THE LOOK

Finally. Finally, you've taken the plunge and upgraded your look. For years, I firmly felt that *CG(W)*'s sterile, blocky look undermined what has always been the best-written game magazine. Your new look, new layout, and especially your new editorials, are refreshingly excellent, and finally bring the look of the magazine up to the standard of the articles of the magazine (did I say finally?). For giving a longtime reader what he's asked for numerous times, my thanks!

I do have a question which puzzles me. In your previews for WING COMMANDER IV, you stated that the use of film instead of video really would increase the quality of the cinematics, but that only Sony Playstation users would see the difference. You explained that PC users probably would see little change from the cinematics in WING 3. Yet, WING IV operates in full 16-bit color mode, which means quite an increase in colors which, coupled with the increased resolution, should make the film's enhanced quality readily apparent. I am not familiar with the specs of the Sony Playstation, but you'll have to excuse me if I find it a little difficult to believe that 16-bit SVGA resolution will not convey the increased quality of film to PC users.

Raphael Tehan
Berkeley, CA

I know it's hard to believe, but as PC-centric as we have traditionally been, we know that the Playstation has the advantage on this one. 16-bit SVGA offers circa 35,000 colors. The Playstation supports more than a million. The 16-bit SVGA playback will be hindered by video compression issues. The Playstation has a JPEG chip. The use of 35 mm film should enhance the SVGA graphics some, but it won't be as noticeable as it will be on the Playstation. Of course, when it comes to resolution—the PC will win out. It just can't compete in terms of flesh tones and video speed.

NUKE THE DUKE

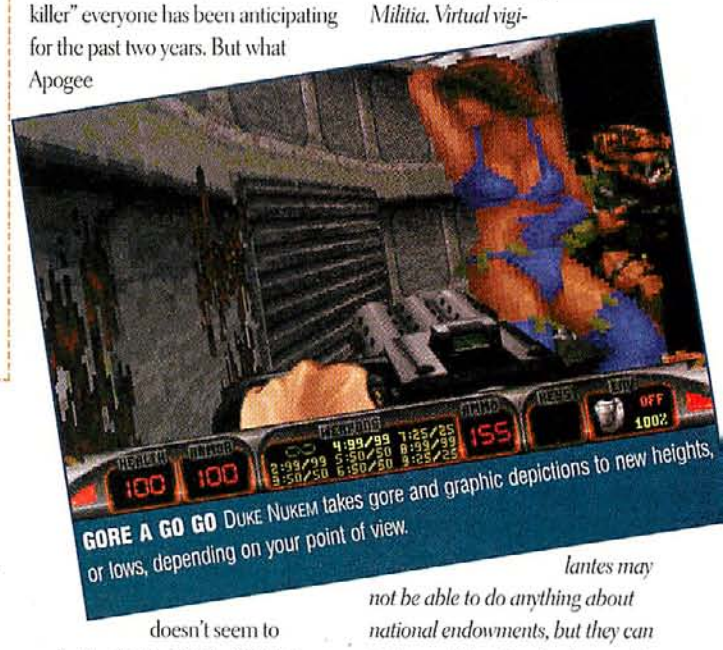
Over the past few years, I have watched the gaming industry lean more and more towards gratuitous violence. For the most part it hasn't concerned me, but yesterday I downloaded a game which went over the line. I sure you know which one I'm talking about—DUKE NUKEM 3D. Now I really enjoy the whole DOOM-clone genre, but Apogee has released the most tasteless piece of garbage I have ever seen. Killing monsters doesn't bother me, because they don't exist. But in the second level of the shareware Duke, you can kill female strippers in a bar. Violence against defenseless women is a *very* real problem, and for Apogee to add this "feature" for the gamer's entertainment is sickening and incredibly irresponsible. The shareware game is available for free from all the major online services and many internet sites. Anyone can access the game, including children. Now, I know Apogee's response: "There's a parental password to protect children". But I think we all know that kids are *much* more adept at computers than their parents, and some parents just don't care. There have been computers in my home for the past 12 years, and my parents barely know how to turn one on, let alone set a password lock-out.

The sad thing is that DUKE is probably the closest thing to the "Doom-killer" everyone has been anticipating for the past two years. But what Apogee doesn't seem to understand is that it's the GAMEPLAY that made DOOM so good, not the blood and gore, and certainly not the killing of innocent women. Apogee seems to think that more shock value equals more sales. Unfortunately, they're probably right, but I really wish that Apogee and other companies would show just a little bit of decency, rather than catering to the lowest common denominator.

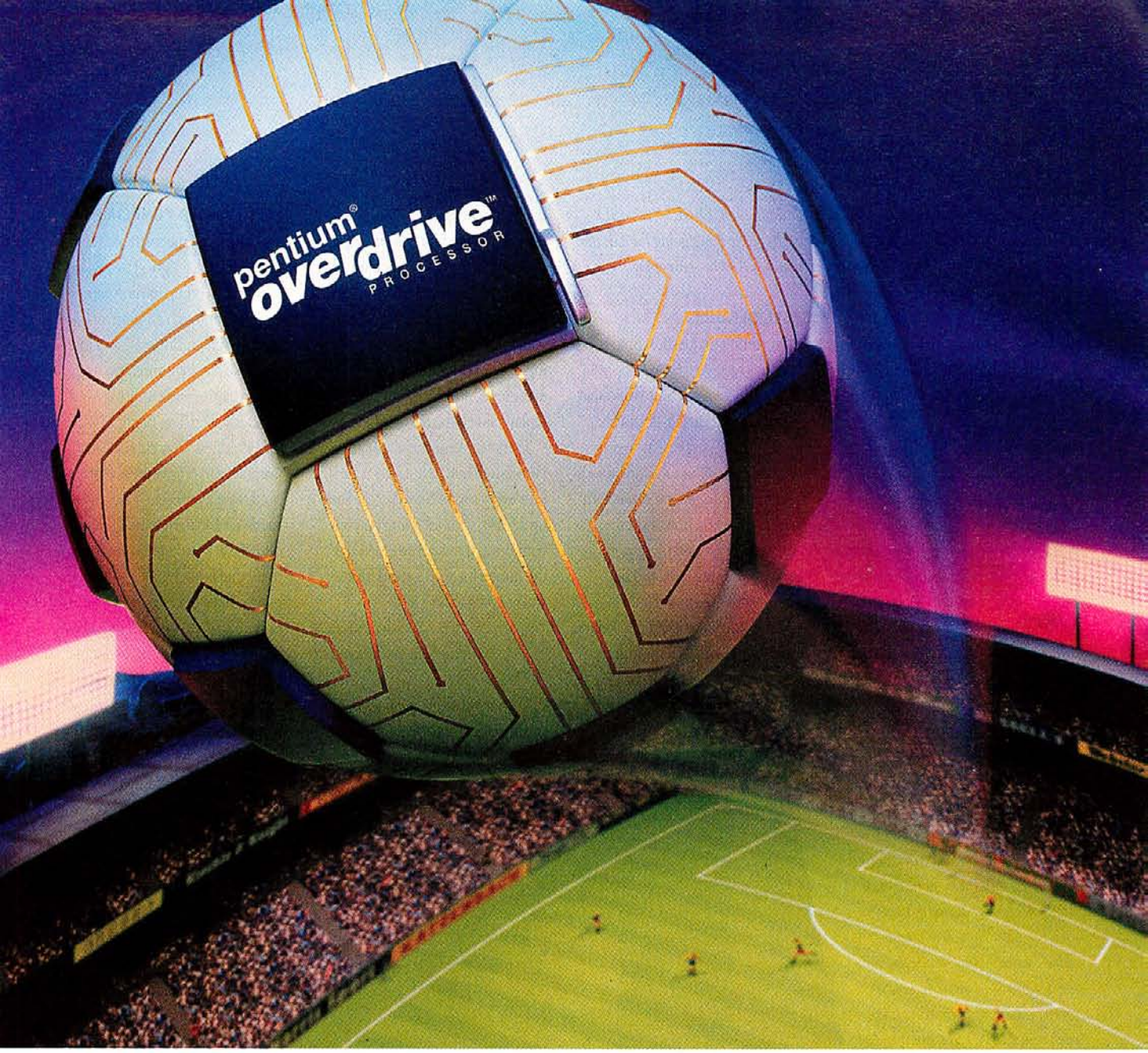
I realize that I'm in the minority, and that my opinion is not a popular one. But what I am asking is for those people who feel the same way I do, don't buy the game, or any other Apogee game for that matter. I know it's tempting, but there will be other 3D games that will be just as good, if not better. Don't even pirate it... show Apogee and other companies that using shock-value tactics are only going to be effective for so long before they go too far.

Lane Denson
MTSU

We thought the strippers were put there to appeal to the Jesse Helms Militia. Virtual vigilantes may not be able to do anything about national endowments, but they can put an end to natural endowments. Sorry about that. Anyway, we think the question actually hinges on verisimilitude. If you couldn't kill the strippers, you would feel like the game was unnaturally restricting you. Even



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though the game takes place in a fictional world, you'd probably complain, "This isn't very realistic!" We think that every "individual" in a game should be "active." If it's in the game, you should be able to shoot it. That doesn't mean that you should *shoot it, just that you should have the option. Of course, regular readers of* Computer Gaming World *also know that we think there should be consequences, too. In the real world, a person who touches a stripper usually gets speedily ejected from the premises. If Duke wastes the strippers, he is immediately assailed by (and often killed by) armed aliens. Maybe that will make the player consider killing innocents more carefully.*

As to the other part of your point—that the game implies violence to real women is okay—note that the women do not disintegrate into the bloody carcasses that the slaughtered monsters become. They disintegrate into money. One could even argue that the symbology is that strippers aren't real women, they're merchandise. Then, you could debate whether the game was making a subtle statement against or for the exploitation of women in such venues. BUT, the point is that no one who plays this game believes that the result of shooting a real woman, even in a strip joint, would be to get free money. The design team knew gamers and knew that gamers would shoot anything. They put in an unexpected effect that essentially says, "Okay, you did that. Very funny, here's some money (though it does you no good), go back to the game."

Now, it's very obvious that shock value is intended in this game. You don't have priests strung up in churches with upside-down crosses without going for shock value. It's not shock value that's causing people to play it, though. DUKE NUKEM 3D *has the same thing going for it as the initial* DOOM *—gameplay.*

REBEL DEFAULT

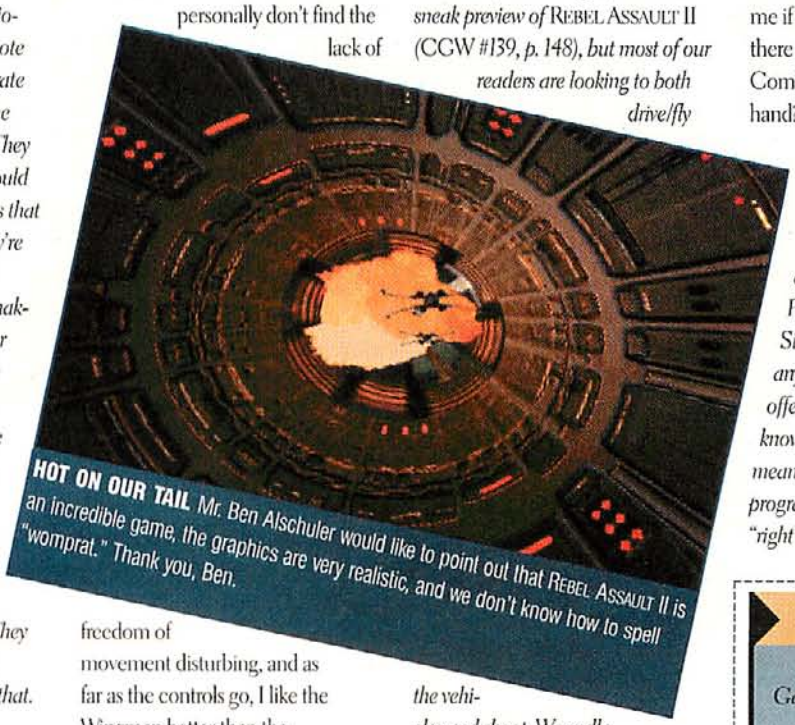
I'm writing to question Shane Mooney's review of REBEL ASSAULT II. I am a 14 year old *Star Wars* fanatic (unlike the reviewer, obviously, who spelled "womprat" as "wombat") and found this to be an incredible game. I did agree on some complaints, mainly on how short the game was, but found many complaints to be quite critical. The toughness of the game could be altered through the Difficulty Editor, which I thought was a marvelous idea. I found the acting to be very decent, and I didn't notice it a bit. I personally don't find the lack of freedom of movement disturbing, and as far as the controls go, I like the Wingman better than the Sidewinder and found the controls to be fine, considering that there was a joystick sensitivity editor. I also loved the lingo, such as "It's darker than Sarlacc's belly down here."

As for good aspects of the game, no mention was made to how realistic the graphics are, and how much damn fun the game is. Maybe Mr. Mooney didn't find this game too gripping, but for a young adult who has had a lifelong dream from childhood to ride a speeder bike and live with the Ewoks, this game was nothing short of stupendous. I loved every level, and have found the replay value to be tremendous.

I seriously urge any die-hard *Star Wars* fan to buy REBEL ASSAULT II. It puts every sort of *Star Wars* action on 2 CD's, without going on your hard drive. If this game packs half the punch for you as it did for me, you're going to love it.

Ben Alschuler
Hingham, Massachusetts

We did praise the graphics in our sneak preview of REBEL ASSAULT II *(CGW #139, p. 148), but most of our readers are looking to both drive/fly the vehicles and shoot. We really get the feeling in* REBEL ASSAULT II *that we're on a rollercoaster as we shoot at the enemy. We know that doesn't matter to many* Stars Wars *fans such as yourself. Of course, if we were actually to shoot a womprat, we wouldn't know how to spell it.*



HOT ON OUR TAIL Mr. Ben Alschuler would like to point out that REBEL ASSAULT II is an incredible game, the graphics are very realistic, and we don't know how to spell "womprat." Thank you, Ben.

LEFT-HANDED COMPLIMENT

First off, let me say that I really enjoy reading CGW. The reviews and articles on upcoming games and breakthrough gaming technologies are very informative and insightful. I like playing simulators and action games and currently use a joystick called The Flight Stick from CH Products. I would really like to purchase [a] programmable joystick, but I have a problem. They are all made for the right hand and I am one of the many gamers/readers out there that is left handed. All my life people have been trying to make me primarily use my right hand. I have become adept at using my right hand, but my reaction time is not as fast as with my left. Could you tell me if there is any manufacturer out there that produces a version of their Combat/Fighter stick for the left hand?

John Penner
From The Internet

We don't actually know of any left-handed joysticks. Perhaps Microsoft will build a Sinister Sidewinder. If there are any joystick manufacturers who offer such a device, please let us know and we'll pass it on. In the meantime, you should check out the programmable ones that have the "right" feel for your hand.

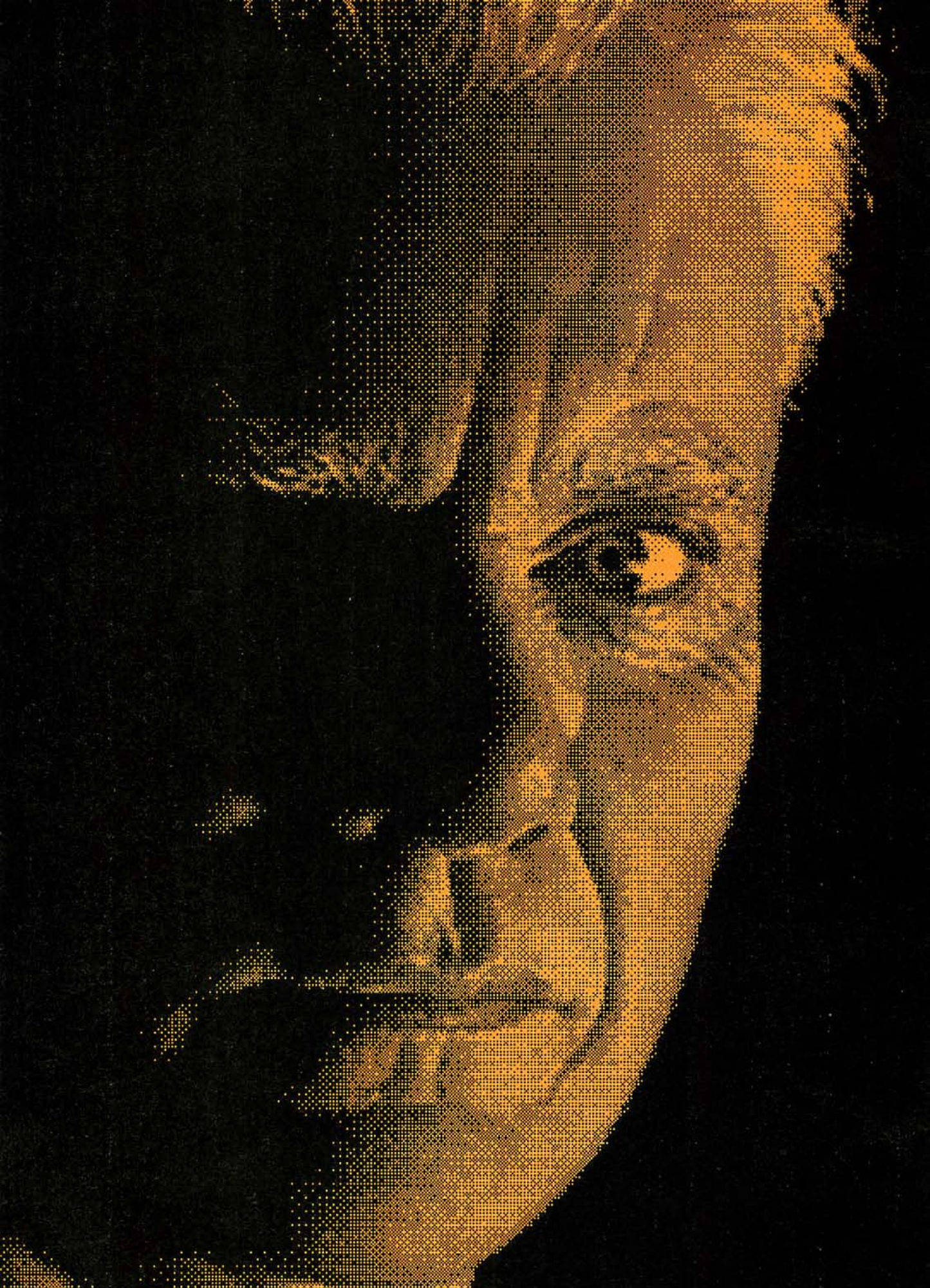
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WING COMMANDER IV

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— Next Generation

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Gateway And The Big Picture

Say Goodbye To Your Television

Past attempts at putting computers in the living room have been abysmal failures. Units such as the Tandy VIS, Commodore CDTV, and Philips CD-I—all very basic CD-ROM units without keyboards and designed to connect to the living room TV—were largely ignored by computer users and the mass-market alike. Now Gateway wants to put some computing hardware into your living room home-entertainment center. But instead of connecting to your current TV, Gateway aims to replace it.



The Destination system may not take full advantage of its hybrid nature, but its 31.5-inch-viewable screen definitely deserves a look.

We journeyed to the wilds of South Dakota in early February to spend an evening with a prototype DESTINATION system, the highlight of which is a 31.5-inch VGA monitor that's designed to double as the family TV. Other components include a black-cased Pentium PC, a wireless keyboard, and a wireless trackball remote.

The PC comes with 16 MB of RAM, a 1.2 GB hard drive, an 8x CD-ROM drive, and a 28.8 Kbps modem. On the video side will be an STB graphics board based on BrookTree's BtV chipset, that supports anti-aliasing to cut down on the large-screen jaggies. STB's audio board will be based on AMD's InterWave audio chipset, which Gateway claims will have a Signal-to-Noise ratio around 85 dB—in English, the audio should have very minimal hiss. InterWave also has a wavetable lookup synthesis engine, and supports Sound Blaster emulation in DOS. Unfortunately, this preproduction unit didn't pack the same video and sound cards that will ship with the system, so any final judgements about its audio, video, and TV picture qualities will have to wait until we can get our hands on the shipping version.

Gateway positions DESTINATION as a second computer; one that will be used in the living room to surf the net, explore multimedia, and play games while Mom's running QUICKEN on the other PC. By including Harman Interactive's ELECTRONIC PROGRAM GUIDE, they're also touting it as an enhanced living room TV set.

Unfortunately, some design decisions and omissions keep the DESTINATION from squarely hitting either mark. On the PC front, it's a fine Web browser, but it poses some roadblocks for entertainment use. The infrared keyboard has a laptop-

ON THE SHELF

Here's a quick look at the hottest products on store shelves, as well as the ones that may not survive through the winter chill.

COMMAND & CONQUER: COVERT OPERATIONS

CG HOT

Commanders, we have a situation on our hands. The NOD/GDI have struck again, and this time they have arrived in force. Now we must defend against their renewed onslaught, and then take the war to them, in order to end this conflict once and for all. Ten new missions have been drawn up, to repel their attacks, perform surgical strikes, and conduct other exercises. I won't lie to you, the NOD/GDI are stronger than ever, having used their time to recuperate and grow; but we will finally wipe the Earth of their evil/oppressive presence and restore freedom to the globe. Prepare yourselves, commanders, for 10 more missions for COMMAND & CONQUER that will test even the toughest of generals.



—E. Chin

Westwood Studios/Virgin Interactive (800) 874-4607; ***IBM PC CD-ROM***

Reader Service #302

BAD MOJO

CG WARM

Raunchy and visceral, BAD MOJO hits you like a whiff of something awful. You navigate the counter-tops of a San Francisco ten-

style touch-pad, and the remote control has a trackball, but neither offers the precision or response necessary for gaming use. You may attach a joystick, but Gateway didn't move the port to the front of the unit, so you're forced to reach behind the system to connect it—a daunting prospect considering most home entertainment centers are usually cramped and wire-packed.

As a TV, it's certainly as serviceable as your basic low-end consumer unit, but Gateway hasn't gone far enough to take advantage of the unique capabilities made possible by the TV/PC hybrid. The Harman software offers an on-line version of *TV Guide*, which allows you to browse program schedules, click on programs to select them, and even search for shows by genre, rating and star count. But it could easily do much more—the system would be a much sexier buy for videophiles if you could password-protect particular shows so children couldn't watch them, or click on programs and have your VCR automatically tape them. Although both NTSC and S-Video inputs on the system's video card allow you to watch VCR and laserdisc programs on the DESTINATION screen, there's no software provision for picture-in-picture. And while you can resize the TV display into a small window, the beta software we saw had no provision for setting the window to always display in front of others.

Don't get us wrong—there are aspects of the system that are very exciting, particularly the huge monitor. Playing DUKE NUKEM 3D on a monitor with a 31.5-inch tube gives a new meaning to the word "blast." The monitor is a TV tube with SVGA-quality electron guns to allow high-resolution displays (up to 800x600). We're also happy to see fast processors and lots of memory. But it's a shame that DESTINATION doesn't live up to the potential offered by its unique hybrid nature, and that the hardware itself isn't thought out well enough to completely satisfy either the gamer or the consumer electronics buyer. Sure, it is the first of its kind, but when you drop $4,000 (120 MHz) or $5,000 (166 MHz) for a product, you want it to be right.

We do see much potential here, and we *want* that monitor. If Gateway can fine-tune the system's input devices and ergonomics to create a TV component that takes better advantage of the system's bipolar nature, it may yet become a popular DESTINATION for gamers.—*Denny Atkin & Dave Salvator*

PLAYING LATELY?

READERS' TOP 10

This month, four games debut on our chart, while the popularity of X-COM and PANZER GENERAL finally seems to be waning. Be sure to send in your free feedback card, so that we know what games you've been blowing the most time with lately.

		Last Month	Months On Chart
1.	**Warcraft II** (Blizzard)	1	2
2.	**Steel Panthers** (SSI)	2	4
3.	**Command & Conquer** (Westwood)	4	5
4.	**MechWarrior II** (Activision)	3	6
5.	**Heroes of Might and Magic** (New World Computing)	6	4
6.	**Gabriel Knight** (Sierra)	—	1
7.	**Stonekeep** (Interplay)		5
8.	**EF2000** (Ocean)	—	1
9.	**Caesar II** (Sierra)	—	1
10.	**IndyCar Racing** (Papyrus)	—	1



ement, scurrying over half-eaten TV dinners and cigarette butts to find out who—or what—turned you into a cockroach. Fellow vermin help out by giving you tips for your search, and completing a task triggers cinematic interludes to fill in the missing pieces. BAD MOJO sports a smooth keyboard-controlled interface, complemented by some truly shocking graphics. Compelling, but definitely not "family" entertainment. MYST for Bukowski fans.—*K. Hunter*
Pulse Entertainment,(310) 264-5580; **PC CD-ROM**
Reader Service #301

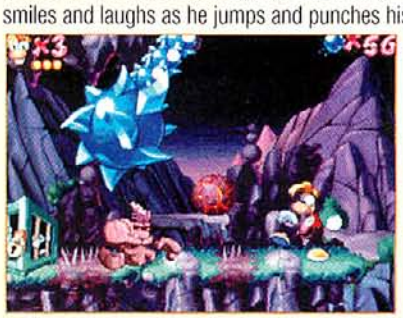
ESPN 2 EXTREME GAMES

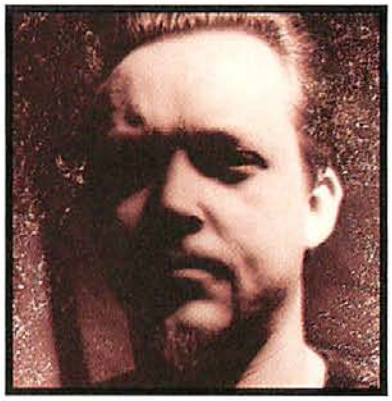
This fast-action derby-style race game sends you into the streets of San Francisco and various other locations. You brave dangerous courses and punch-throwing competitors while riding the "extreme" vehicle of your choice: mountain bike, skateboard, in-line skates or the infamous street luge. We were a little disappointed to see the PC version of this Playstation title had inferior graphics and seriously pixellated video sequences. But we were happy to see that the action remained the same. This is basically a PC version of ROAD RASH—race down a course avoiding obstacles and knocking opponents out of your way. Our initial impression of EXTREME GAMES is that it definitely has some fun potential. But we're not sure, with its lack of diverse gaming elements, if it has legs.—*G. Jones*
Sony (800) 438-7794; **PC CD-ROM**
Reader Service #304



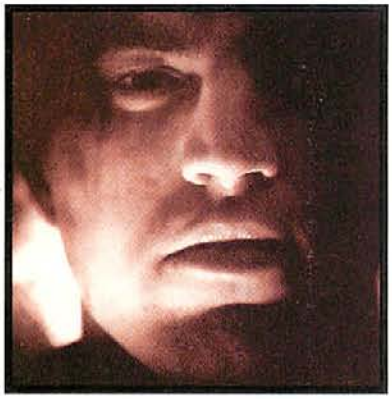
RAYMAN

Don't mistake RAYMAN's happy-go-lucky attitude for weakness. RAYMAN, the hero of the self-titled PC game by Ubi Soft, smiles and laughs as he jumps and punches his




Every day, nearly twenty





report having

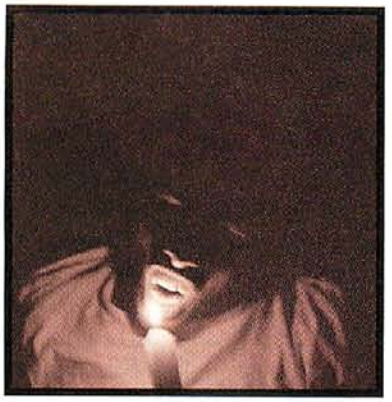




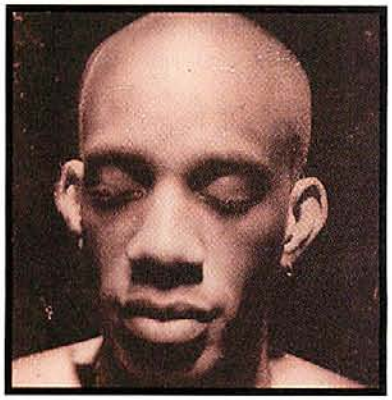
In 1996, that number will increase

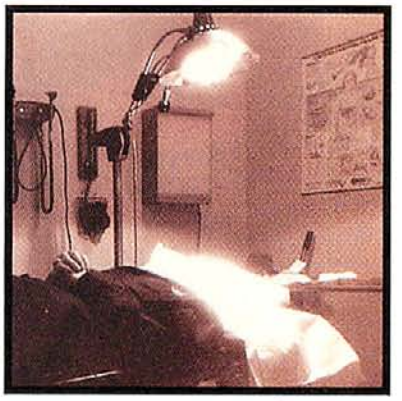
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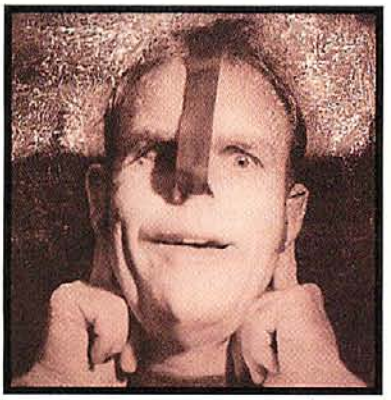




Americans





a near-death experience.


dramatically.



angel devoid

FACE OF THE ENEMY

http://www.mindscape.com

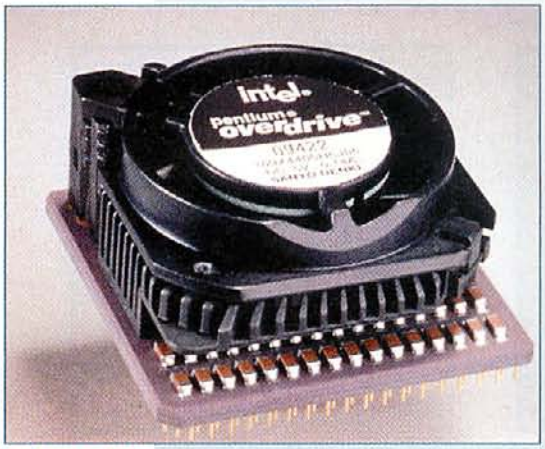
Coming Feb'96 on CD-ROM for Mac & PC.

MATURE M AGES 17+

Circle Reader Service #34

Intel (On Steroids) Inside

Last year, Intel released Pentium OverDrive chips for 486 processors. These were somewhat underwhelming due to performance limitations imposed by 486 motherboard architecture. Now the company has released OverDrive processors for Pentium systems; these are definitely worth a look if you're finding your system is lacking the oomph needed for the latest and greatest games.



Last year's hot Pentium seem slow? Drop in a new processor and put your PC in overdrive.

These chips will be especially welcome to owners of 60- and 66-MHz Pentium systems, which, until now, weren't processor-upgradeable. Although some Pentium 75, 90, and 100 systems can be upgraded to a faster processor simply by tossing in a new Pentium chip and throwing a few jumpers, many don't support the clock multiples of 2 or 2.5 times the speed of the system bus (versus 1.5x for the original chips) used by Pentium chips running over 100 MHz. Another consideration is system noise generated by the high-speed chips—older motherboards may exhibit problems running extremely high-speed processors. The Pentium OverDrive chips include on-chip capacitance to avoid such problems, as well as a built-on fan/heat-sink combo.

We tested two OverDrive chips, a 120-MHz version designed for a P60 system, and a 166-MHz version designed to replace a P100. Both chips provided dramatic speed increases: Overall performance on the P60 system was around 50 percent better, while the P100 system showed almost a 40-percent speed boost. Note that these OverDrive chips won't quite bring older systems up to the performance of the newest hot-rod PCs due to the faster chipsets and cache systems used on newer motherboards. With the 166-MHz OverDrive chip, a late 1994 Dell XPS-100 with an old Intel Neptune motherboard performed about the same as a new Gateway P133 system. Installed in a newer clone system based on an ASUS motherboard, the chip provided full P166 performance.

For more information on the OverDrive chips, check out *http://www.intel.com/procs/ovrdrive* on the World Wide Web, or call Intel at 800-538-3373.

—Denny Atkin

The Need for Speed

Original speed	OverDrive speed	Availability	Retail
60 MHz	120 MHz	Now	$399
66 MHz	133 MHz	Now	$399
75 MHz	125 MHz	Now	$399
90 MHz	150 MHz	May	$499
100 MHz	166 MHz	May	$679

ON THE SHELF

way through several colorful, well-conceived levels. With graphics reminiscent of DONKEY KONG COUNTRY, and some nice gameplay twists, like mini games and dark levels where your vision is limited, RAYMAN entertained us for a spell. This platform game even appears capable of breaking the monotony that plagues many of its counterparts. He's not as cool as EARTHWORM JIM—he's way too cute—but RAYMAN is a pleasant diversion, particularly for younger gamers.—*G. Jones*

Ubi Soft (415) 464-4440; ***PC CD-ROM***
Reader Service #305

WILLIAMS ARCADE CLASSICS

CG HOT

For the past few years I've kicked myself for passing up a chance to buy a used SINISTAR—my favorite coin-op game—for a measly $600. Now the self-abuse can stop. Digital Eclipse and GT Interactive have crammed an entire SINISTAR machine—and five other classic Williams coin-ops—on a single CD-ROM.

These aren't ports, either. They're the actual arcade machine code, running on an emulator under DOS, Win 3.1, or Win 95. The games play *exactly* like the originals; your only concern is finding a good controller. If you were a fan of DEFENDER, DEFENDER II (STARGATE), JOUST, ROBOTRON, BUBBLES, or SINISTAR, the nostalgia and play value here is well worth your quarters.—*D. Atkin*

GT Interactive, (212) 726-6500; ***IBM CD-ROM***
Reader Service #306



DEFCON 5

CG GOLD

DEFCON 5 immediately drops you into the action amidst urgent instructions. "Report to the control room immediately," the feminine voice demands, but you're given no idea where the hell the control room is, or what to do once you get there. But sometimes confusion is good. Once you've consulted the manual (basically a walk-through of the opening

Sierra Sells For $1 Billion

Sierra On-Line, the successful publisher of the best-selling GABRIEL KNIGHT II and CAESAR II, experienced role-reversal on February 20. After successfully acquiring Papyrus Software, publisher of NASCAR RACING and Impressions Software, publisher of CAESAR and SPACE BUCKS, Sierra itself became an acquisition of CUC International, Inc. CUC is best known for its Auto Advantage and Shoppers Advantage services (among other travel, dining, and financial services) provided to 40 million members worldwide. The merger was handled via a pure stock swap with each Sierra shareholder receiving 1.225 shares of CUC common stock for each share of Sierra common stock. The transaction is valued at approximately $1 billion dollars.

According to Sierra On-Line CEO Ken Williams, CUC International is approximately 10 times the size of Sierra. Williams believes the merger will allow the new company to both publish better products and to eventually create the elusive "killer app" on the Internet. He declined comment on the latter, saying it is too early to discuss.

For more perspective on the mergers and acquisitions sweeping the industry, see Johnny Wilson's Editorial.

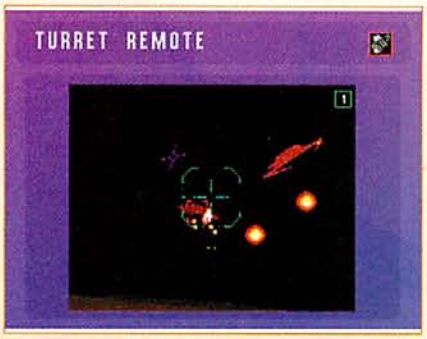
—Jill Anderson

Top 10 Downloads From HAPPY PUPPY GAMES

Title	Description	Publisher
1. Duke Nukem 3D	3D Shooter	Apogee/ 3D Realms
2. Zone Raiders	3D Hovercar Racing/Shooter	Image Space /Virgin
3. Warcraft 2	Realtime Strategy/Wargame	Blizzard
4. Spaced	Side-scrolling	Daniel Haffner
5. Command & Conquer	Strategy/Wargame Adventure	Westwood
6. Beavis & Butthead Virtual Hock-a-Loogie	Moist Overhead Shooter	Viacom New Media
7. Mortal Kombat 3	Martial Arts Action	GT Interactive
8. Screamer	3D Racing	Virgin
9. Apache	Battle Helicopter Sim	DI/I-Magic
10. Need for Speed	Racing Simulation	EA

CGW Handicaps The Happy Puppy Download List

There are no surprises here. We've known Duke Nukem 3D was a sure thing from the time we first saw it last Spring. The game got even better as it progressed and you can expect it to top this list till Quake comes out and gives it a run for its money. If Zone Raiders continues at this level of interest, it could be a sleeper for Virgin. Warcraft 2 and Command & Conquer are also terrific games with plenty of pre-release buzz, so it's no wonder they have appeared on this potential list of hits. We also think that some of the interest in Screamer and Need for Speed may have come from being featured in our "Burning Rubber" round-up during the same time period. Apache continues to prove that there is a market for solid simulations with middle-of-the-road graphics but exceptional gameplay. Expect all of the products mentioned here to do extremely well at retail, most cracking the 100,000 unit barrier.



action sequence) and figured out what to do and how to do it, you 'll wonder in horror, "Why did I buy this game?" Muddled graphics, horrible controls and seriously deficient gameplay make DEFCON 5's wannabee DOOM a most unsettling experience.—*G. Jones*

Vic Tokai; (310) 326-8880; ***IBM PC CD-ROM***
Reader Service #307

LION

This game would have been a great title...two years ago, but LION borrows so heavily from its predecessor, WOLF, without adding anything new, that it comes off looking like an old and dated product. LION offers the same role-playing experience as WOLF (you assume all aspects of the animal's life: hunting, mating, and surviving), except this time you are the King of Beasts in the African Savannah. However, the key element missing from LION is gameplay. WOLF had it back in 1993, and it was a relatively groundbreaking and fun game. LION's main problem is the graphics; they haven't been upgraded since WOLF, and they are so bad it's hard to discern a gazelle from a rock. Basically, LION looks and feels exactly like WOLF did two years ago, save for the change of species and venue. Today though, without updated graphics, this type of game just isn't as fun anymore.—*E. Chin*



Sanctuary Woods (415) 286-6000
IBM PC CD-ROM
Reader Service #303


Now Available
Command & Conquer: The Covert Operations*
Featuring 15 New Missions
WAR
IS HELL. BUT ONLY IF IT'S DONE
RIGHT.
TEEN
AGES 13+
* You must own Command & Conquer to play.

The **NEAR FUTURE** looms ahead on the horizon like a toxic cloud. Knowledge is power. Technology is deadly. And the information highway is littered with **ROADKILL.** It's the world of *Command & Conquer™*, the frighteningly realistic new strategy game from the creators of *Dune™ II*. Here, your quick thinking is **REWARDED** with victory; your **INDECISION,** death. You will choose your side. Build your bases. Gather resources. Attack enemy strongholds. And react as if your life depended on it. Because it does. Your **WEAPONRY?** Unlike any you've experienced before. Hoards of futuristic fighter craft. **THUNDERING** 50-gigawatt ion cannons. And the terrifying



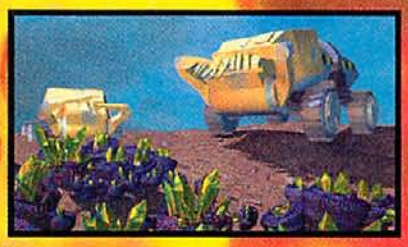
Devil's Tongue flame-thrower. Your only ally? A constant barrage of satellite news reports from the front. But **BE WARNED:** One ill-planned **ATTACK** and you're a statistic. *Command & Conquer.* Two compact discs packed with real-time, right-now action, over 60 minutes of intense full-motion video, and a ton of **JAW-DROPPING,** 3-D rendered gameplay that'll take you headfirst into the thick of **BATTLE.** Now that's something even amateur **WARMONGERS** will appreciate. Just call 800-874-4607 to order direct or visit your nearest retail outlet. If you would like more information, please contact Westwood Studios on the Internet:

Virgin

Westwood Studios

www.westwood.com













TV Initiative

A consortium of vendors called the POWER alliance has big plans for the Interactive Age. Comprised of Scientific-Atlanta, PowerTV, Sybase, 3D Labs, and Oracle among others, the POWER alliance is seeking to put a set-top box in your living room to deliver "interactive" content—including games. Using a proprietary OS, the box is priced at about $500, will have as little as 512 KB RAM, and will rely heavily on isochronous, or "just-in-time" data streamed from the service provider's servers.

There's been a good bit of buzz about cable modems for PCs, but TV cable systems are much more optimized for "downstream" bandwidth (from cable provider to your house) rather than sending bits the other direction. Will this be a boon for on-line gaming, delivering on the promise of lots of cheap bandwidth for the ultimate gaming spectacle? And more importantly, will these new set-top boxes play nice with your existing game rig? We're not so sure. Check out our web site this month where Dave Salvator takes a closer look at the ins and outs of POWER's big plans, and what we can anticipate.

Origin To Use Real Spacecraft In *Wing Commander V*

With Wing Commander IV barely a month old, Origin has already announced incredible plans for the next game in the highly successful series. In another first for a computer game company, Origin says it will design small working models of highly maneuverable drones which can be launched into space, piloted remotely and filmed. The craft will enable Wing V to have "unprecedented space flight realism and true 'star appeal,'" says a company spokesperson.



CHALK ONE UP TO THE MANIAC Origin's bold vision of true space-based combat could cost billions. This is an artist's conception of a Wing V booster vehicle.

Although the next game in the SF series sounds more like fiction than science, Origin's Chris Roberts says it's the next logical step for his six-year old creation. "If you think about it," he says, "Wing Commander was the game where we learned the mechanics of space fighting. We made lots of changes and improvements to the overall design in Wing II. With Wing III, we raised the bar considerably with better graphics, more realistic action, full-motion video and big name stars in the video segments. In Wing IV, we upped the ante again with real sets, more video, and, in my opinion, a much better story. We've reached the point of using real stars and real sets—now it's time to take our act on location: real space."

Analysts say it's nearly impossible to estimate the cost of such an undertaking. Some put the figures at between $100 million and $10 billion, just to deploy a small number of remotely pilotable vehicles beyond earth's atmosphere. Despite this, Origin's Lord British (Richard Garriott) claims that he has much of the necessary financial support from investors. Says Garriott, "When we told [investors] what we wanted to do for Wing Commander V, they were amazed. We're talking about one of man's deepest desires—to break free of the bonds of earth. ... We know it seems costly in comparison with other games, but this is unlike anything that's ever been done. I don't see any problem getting the financial backing for this project, and we expect to recoup the investment in the first week. You're going to see a worldwide release on eight platforms in 36 countries—it's going to be a huge event. It'll dwarf even Windows 95."

For those who still remain planted on terra firma, Garriott counters that Origin doesn't have to create everything from scratch. "There are now six separate countries which can launch satellites into space, and we're talking with all of them. We're also engaged in ongoing discussions with NASA, whose aeronautical engineers have been sharing a great deal of technical information with us in exchange for our latest releases."

Both Roberts and Garriott declined further questions, but they did say that most gamers don't have the necessary hardware for such a game. Leaving the press conference, Garriott flashed a quick aside, "If you haven't already," he said with a smile, "now's the time to start thinking about that upgrade to a super-cooled mainframe."

Reprinted by permission from "The Fool," (April, 1996).

ON THE SHELF

ISLAND CASINO

CG GOLD

The tropical beaches of San Juan provide a warm, inviting opening video for this title, but don't be fooled—it doesn't get much colder than this. Although this is a promising concept for teaching the fundamentals of gambling games, such as Craps, Mini Baccarat, Roulette and a wide variety of card games, this buggy two-CD ROM game is bogged down with superimposed minute video boxes, point-and-click navigation through static casino scenes and superfluous dialogue. True to life, you register at the hotel's front desk and get a room filled with "interactive" gadgets, but they hardly qualify as gameplay. Ultimately all is not wasted; it is a good tutorial for learning new gambling games, and the casino and Vegas games are enjoyable.



—J. Anderson

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SIGHTINGS

Here's an early look at the space invaders that will be vying for room on your hard drive. Some of these games are still months away, and they aren't even playable yet, but at least you can see what they look like, and get an idea what their intentions are.

Super Heroes

We hope we're not jinxing things, but finally—a superheroes game that will actually ship! SUPERHEROES, by MicroProse, uses a high resolution version of the X-COM engine to put you in control of your own Hall of Justice. You'll scramble heroes to various locations around the globe and command them against the forces of evil. Superpowers, of course, will factor into battles—how else can you explain knocked-out villains crashing through walls? From our initial glance, SUPERHEROES looks great. The only thing missing will be a Marvel or DC license...



Magic: The Gathering

The game has changed significantly since we looked at the aborted DOS version last June. Besides being converted to Windows 95, the game will be much more oriented toward solitaire play as a stand-alone adventure game. You move through the Magic universe via the typical 3/4 oblique overhead perspective of classic adventure/role-playing games and there is a definite goal to the game. Now, the game should be considered the story of your deck. Your goal is to defeat all five evil wizards (corresponding to the sources of power within the game), and you must build your deck to be able to accomplish this. Also, the game's AI is no longer oriented around specific decks. Sid Meier is building a very robust AI for all seasons. Fighting duels for rare cards, taking on quests, and answering riddles based on the Magic universe will still be in the game, but it is now expected to be a 10-25 hour game from start to finish with enough random worlds to encourage repeat play. The interface is still in development, so rather than show you an interface that won't be in the game, we have included here a picture of a Catwarrior, typical of the art in the game.





History of the World

This departure from the normally complex boardgaming fare of Avalon Hill resulted in one of their best-selling strategy games in several years. HISTORY OF THE WORLD is a simple multiplayer game with an interesting twist: instead of managing a single country through the ages, you play a series of empires from the lowly Khmer to the mighty Romans and Mongols. Various cards improve attack and defense, allow you take territories through treachery, and even subject entire continents to plague. A wonderful cutthroat game where the winner is rarely decided until the last turn, HISTORY OF THE WORLD should cause desktop empires to rise and fall by late Summer.

Titanic

The year is 1912. It's half-past eleven, and you've been dining and dancing across the Atlantic on the ultimate luxury liner—the Titanic. At precisely 11:40 p.m. the ship is going to hit the iceburg that sinks it and begins your race against the clock in this 3-D adventure game. You have until 2:40 a.m. to collect clues and solve the puzzles that may alter history as we know it. Cyberflix' TITANIC employs over 35 interactive period characters and an accurate 3-D re-creation of the ship. History buffs can also step out of the time line and take a casual tour of the ship, and exlpore the art and relics of the period.



HANDS ON

These are the games in development we've actually spent some time playing. They represent some of the most interesting titles in the Pipeline, and they are complete enough to actually tell how they're going to play. Most should be released soon.

Duke Nukem 3D

Rats scurry across the floor. Water drips from the ceiling. Crouching near the entrance to the bar, you pitch a pipe bomb into the room and detonate it to the unearthly screams of dying mutants. In the midst of the confusion, you burst into the room shotgun blazing, blowing holes in the aliens and leaving large patches of blood oozing down the walls. It's right around then, spying a pretty girl by a tub of iced beer, that you start to realize this is more than just a DOOM clone—it's a game made for truly sick people like *you*.



But it gets better. Scooping up ammo along the way, you follow the sound of pulsating disco music that leads to a kind of nightclub. Inside, in addition to a horde of evil maniacs, five shapely dancers gyrate to a throbbing beat on three elevated stages. After ventilating the creatures, you hop up on stage with the dancers, offering a few bucks in exchange for a glimpse of their virtues. Rats? Girls? Guns? Grenades? What did they leave out? Certainly not the bathrooms. Toilets are excellent places to: a) relieve yourself with audio accompaniment, 2) kick fixtures and see lovely blue geysers, or 3) dispense a powerful laxative from across the room to a pot-sitting mutant, in the form of an easy-to-swallow rocket-propelled grenade.

All this fun, and we haven't even been underwater yet. Or strapped on a jetpack and dive-bombed an unsuspecting victim with a high-explosive care package. Or lured an enemy into a room with a hologram and made him dance a fevered jig while stitching his intestines with machine gun rounds. Love may be a many-splendored thing, but you sure won't care when DUKE NUKEM comes to town.

If you haven't played it yet, DUKE NUKEM 3D is the new first-person killing spree from 3D Realms, a division of Apogee. Like other Apogee games, DUKE is available in a shareware version which can be downloaded from various web sites (see www.3drealms.com). The game supports eight players on a local network or two players via modem.

In addition to advancing the state of the art of 3-D action games with sloping surfaces, underwater combat, wonderful explosions and politically incorrect gratuitous violence and sex, DUKE NUKEM 3D has the richest environment of any of the so-called DOOM clones. There are more things to see and do in DUKE than you've ever seen in DOOM or HERETIC or HEXEN. Its true 3D engine enables greater freedom of movement, including crouching, looking up or down, jumping, swimming and flying. There are good sound effects and amusing digital audio quips like, "Who wants some?," and "Holy sh—!" The screen size, resolution, gore and cheesecake can be scaled to suit your taste and system performance.

We think DUKE NUKEM will be one of the hottest action games for 1996, and we eagerly await the final version's release in March. *—Ken Brown*

Apogee/FormGen 888-FormGen (367-6436)

PC

RIPPER

Combine the acting talents of Christopher Walken, Karen Allen, Burgess Meredith with some intriguing graphic adventure puzzles and a future noir horror plot with cyberpunk wrapping. The result is RIPPER, an interactive movie with enough solid game elements to keep you hanging in there until you solve the mystery. You're cast in the role of an investigative reporter on the homicide beat. You've solved a few cases in the past, so the police don't like you and give you the same kind of verbal abuse you'd expect to receive as a Raymond Chandler private eye. The main difference is that this is the future. Many of the victims are splayed open in graphic gore in front of their computers, even though (dramatic pause) all the doors and windows were locked.





You wander around with a nouveau Newton, a futuristic PDA that is a combination scanner, cellular phone and computer, and collect clues and evidence. One such clue is the scanning of a broken cup. You scan it because a police detective just broke it in front of you with obvious

HANDS ON

intent to keep you in the dark. You discover something written on the cup, BUT you have to put the virtual cup together on your computer screen in order to get the clue. Now, we've seen 3-D jigsaw puzzles on computer screens before, but rarely worked quite so logically into the game's story.

Our early experiences with the game indicate that the acting is mixed. With the professional cast, you'd expect sterling performances at every juncture. To be sure, there are some sterling performances in the game, but they don't always come from the big name players. The best news is that the game really does have multiple endings.

RIPPER may well be the elusive replayable graphic adventure we've expected for so long.—*Johnny L. Wilson*

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PC CD-ROM

Sid Meier's Civilization II

You've lost several years of your life to CIVILIZATION. You've fallen back into that dangerous addiction with CIVNET. Well, now it's time to throw away whatever life you've managed to reconstruct, because SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION II is coming to a computer near you, and what happens next isn't going to be pretty. Of course, I mean that in a good way.

In CIVILIZATION II, we have new units, new technologies, new tribes, new diplomatic options, SVGA graphics, a 3-D isometric view that actually works, multimedia flicks and sounds that enhance and illustrate your conquests and discoveries, and a veritable fruit basket of new Wonders of the World. Another welcome addition is a Far Eastern town/castle model, so now gamers who select China as a tribe won't have to live in Grecian forums or European castles. The AI in CIV II should be much more challenging, and for those who thought the Emperor level was a cake-walk in the original CIV, there is a sixth level of difficulty: Divinity level. The diplomatic options included will let you establish territorial borders, set up more sophisticated trade and exchange treaties, and form cooperative alliances. Another addition to whet the appetites of gamers is the inclusion of scenarios (we only played the World War II scenario where we could play one of seven nations in the war).

For those of us spoiled by the sophisticated combat of recent wargames, CIV II offers a much-enhanced combat resolution system. Units now have "hit points" represented by a health bar that displays the damage being suffered in combat. Units can also be repaired now, and new facilities, such as ports, will provide more modifiers to combat.

The only problem we saw with CIV II is that Microprose maintains that it will release as a stand-alone product, without any multiplayer capability. While CIV II looks like a phenomenal game already, it would be even better as a multiplayer game. Whether Microprose will heed our advice, and the wishes of thousands of gamers, remains to be seen. We certainly hope they can plug in multiplay before their summer release time frame.

CIVILIZATION II looks like it will revolutionize strategy gaming today, just as CIVILIZATION did five years ago. It looks better, plays better, and offers a plethora of new options, without sacrificing the gameplay that made the original a true classic. CIVNET was only a minor tidbit to tide us over until the real big show: CIVILIZATION II, and what a show it will be.—*Elliott Chin*

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PC CD-ROM



PIPELINE

10th Planet Bethesda	9/96
1943 European Air War MicroProse	Q2/96
AD&D Deathkeep SSI	5/96
Afterlife LucasArts	Spring 96
Age of Rifles SSI	7/96
American Civil War Interactive Magic	Q2/96
Azrael's Tear Mindscape	6/96
Betrayal In Antara Sierra	9/96
Callahan's Crosstime Saloon Legend	Spring 96
Chessmaster 5000 Mindscape	4/96
Conquest of the New World Interplay	4/96
Daggerfall Bethesda	Q2/96
Dark Earth Mindscape	10/96
Duke Nukem 3D 3D Realms	3/96
Guardians of Destiny Virgin	Q2/96
History of the World Avalon Hill	8/96
Jagged Alliance Gold Summer	96
Lighthouse Sierra	6/96
Magic of Xanth Legend	Fall 96
Magic the Gathering MicroProse	Summer 96
Master of Orion 2: Antares MicroProse	Q2/96
MegaRace 2 Mindscape	4/96
Metal Lords New World	Spring 96
Micro League Baseball 96 MicroLeague	6/96
Mission Force: Cyberstorm Sierra	Spring 96
Monty Python & Holy Grail 7th Level	Summer 96
Myst II Broderbund	Q2/96
Nemesis Sir-Tech	9/96
Over the Reich Avalon Hill	5/96
Pax Imperia II Blizzard	Q1/96
Return to Krondor 7th Level	6/96
Ripper Take 2	Spring 96
Robert E. Lee Sierra	6/96
Shadows of Riva Sir-Tech	8/96
Sid Meier's Civilization II MicroProse	3/96
Star Fleet Academy Interplay	Summer 96
Star Trader Mindscape	6/96
SuperHeroes MicroProse	Q2/96
Terra Nova Virgin	4/96
The Dame Was Loaded Philips	4/96
The Last Blitzkrieg SSG	Q1/96
Theme Hospital Bullfrog/EA	4/96
Third Reich Avalon Hill	6/96
Threshold Mindscape	5/96
Timelapse GTE Entertainment	8/96
X-Com 3: The Apocalypse MicroProse	Fall 96
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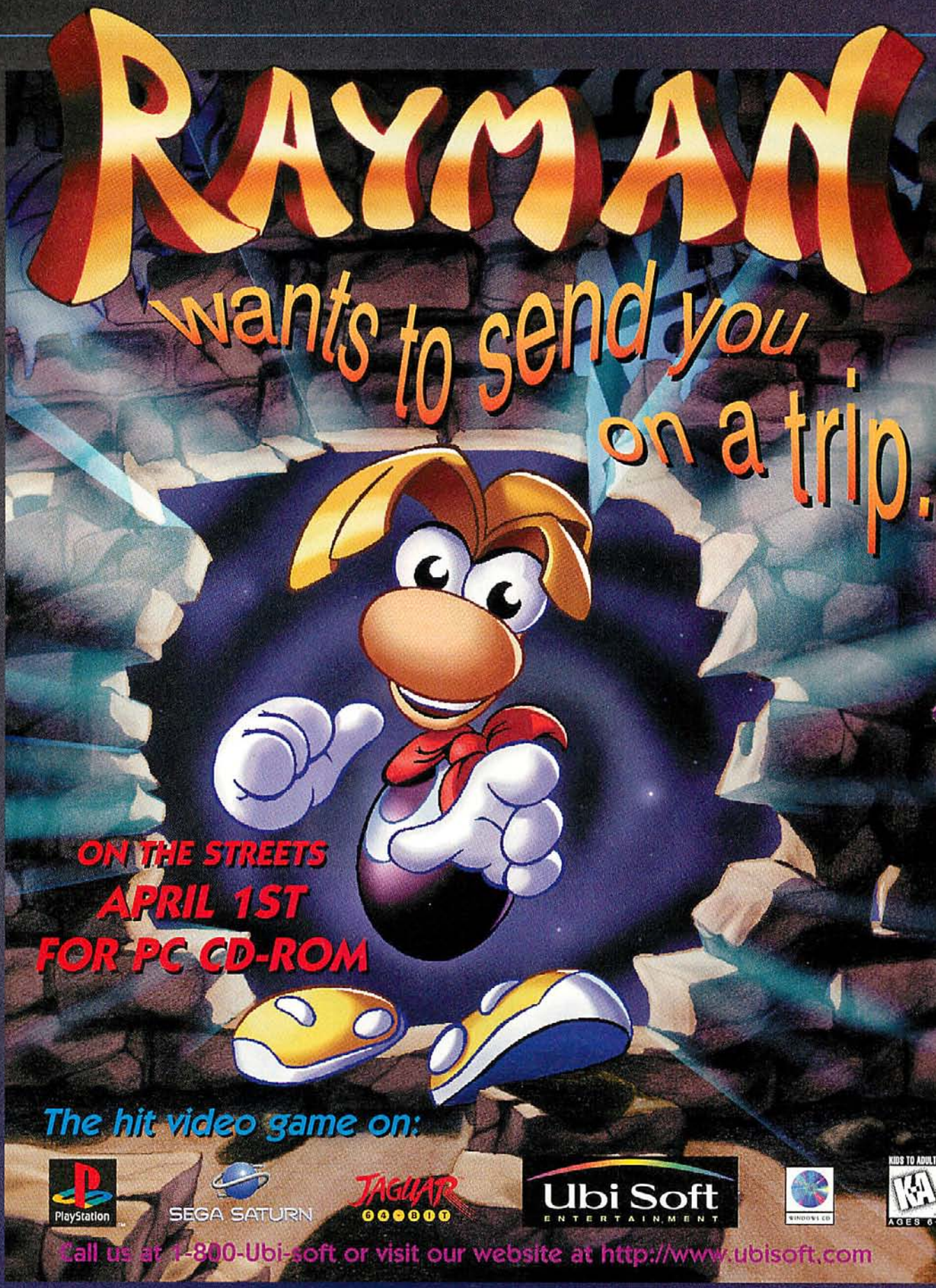
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PlayStation

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RAYMAN Demo Questions

1. All this outrageous action takes place in this setting.
2. You do this to make the valuable purple fruit fall.
3. There is an extra one of these hidden on the platform above the wooden hand.
4. What piece of gold do you get if you float on the purple fruit?
5. How many hidden cages are in this demo?
6. (down) Rayman will scream if you _ _ _ _ too far over the side of the platform.
6. (across) When you press the X button on your keyboard, what is it that Rayman sticks out to scare the taller guards?
7. What kind of slimy animals do you have to dodge when you are climbing the pink and purple vines?
8. Go to the Ubi Soft web site to learn the game's _____ codes. (http://www.ubisoft.com)



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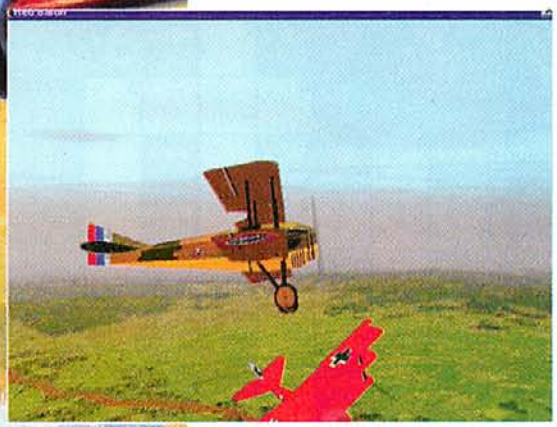
Sierra/Dynamix's Ground-Up Remake Of A Classic Scores A Bullseye

by Denny Atkin

On July 6, 1917, a British bullet round grazed the skull of Manfred von Richtofen—the Red Baron—and the famed pilot spun down to a crash landing. Although he recovered within a month and went back into combat, his performance didn't match his early glory—he scored only six kills in eight months, going a six-month period with only two planes downed.

With the original 1991 RED BARON widely considered the benchmark World War I simulation (it can still be found on store shelves today), many sim fliers have been concerned that its sequel might fly more like the post-July 6 Richtofen: impressive, but lacking its former glory. It doesn't seem possible to add all the bells and whistles needed to please today's sim flyer and still maintain the authenticity and fun that gave the original such long legs.

Well, it might not be possible for many development teams, but when you take the experience and talent that created the original RED BARON and add in one of the creative forces behind FALCON 3.0 (perhaps the only other sim to enjoy BARON's longevity), you're not talking about just any development team. And I'm happy to report that the early version of RED BARON II (RBII) that I've been flying for the past few weeks indicates not only that RBII won't disappoint, but that it should blow the flying scarves off even the most jaded and experienced flight sim fans.



CLOSE ENCOUNTER That's Richtofen himself passing under your plane; better watch your six.

BASE INSTINCTS

The first thing you're likely to see upon booting RBII is a large window behind an oak desk, through which you'll notice a Fokker triplane taxiing away. The window is an ironic centerpiece for RBII's interface, since it's a Windows 95 engine that serves as the foundation for most of this sequel's enhancements.



CHASING TAIL If this pilot wasn't on our side, he'd be making peace with his maker about now.

You'll mouse your way around a nicely rendered base HQ to select your missions, track the progress of the war, and learn what's happening with your squadron mates. The interface strikes a nice balance between setting a World War I mood and allowing you to quickly accomplish your between-flight tasks.

The aforementioned window sits atop a desk that serves as the game's control center. It's here you'll choose the type of game (Quick Fly, Single Mission, or Campaign), check high scores, and access other modules such as multi-player support and the mission builder. When you're playing in career mode you'll also have access to an officer's lounge where you can check the progress of the war in the local newspaper, eavesdrop on card games to catch rumors from your squadron mates, and so on. Finally, there's the Operations Office, where you'll plan your mission using a particularly cool sandtable interface. (The lack of computers didn't keep WWI mission planners from creating 3-D models of their target environments—they simply built them from sand.)

Win 95 also plays a big part of the flight portion of the game. RBII uses Microsoft's DirectX routines (Direct Draw, Direct Sound, etc.) in the flight module, allowing the game to take full advantage of the graphics hardware on your video card. Even the early, unopti-

mized code I flew showed the advantage of this scheme—the frame rate in RBII was decidedly smoother under Win 95 than some equally detailed DOS games, such as EF2000, on the same machine.

IN THE AIR TONIGHT

One of the driving forces behind RBII is Gary Stottlemyer, late of Spectrum HoloByte. Stottlemyer was one of the central designers of FALCON 3.0, and also helped design FALCON 4.0 before leaving Spectrum. Now he's tasked with making RBII a game that will satisfy not only gamers who started with the original BARON (and who are likely pretty hard-core by now), but also newer PC pilots.

"First and foremost, I'm a flight sim fan," Stottlemyer says. "I got into this industry to do sims *right*." An aerobatics pilot who spent five years studying, researching, and implementing flight models for the FALCON series, he says he's confident that RBII's model has "the right stuff."

It's not some magic new modeling technique that make's RBII fly well. "Oddly, it's really just theory and formulae that's been around since the NACA efforts of the 1920's," Stottlemyer explains. "It's only now that we have PCs capable of handling those calculations."

Flying the planes in the current Alpha version of RBII, I was pleasantly surprised at some of the maneuvers I was able to pull off—and the ones I couldn't (and shouldn't have been able to). The maneuvers invented in RBII's era, such as Immelmans, can be pulled off, but you'll have to watch your speed or you'll also be able to test the authenticity of RBII's departure characteristics. Try to pull off an F-15-style zoom climb and you'll see how well the sim model tail-slides. These planes didn't have power to spare, and if you've never flown a WWI sim before, be prepared to learn some new combat techniques.

PILOT PROGRAMS

Of course, realistic aircraft performance is only half the task at hand. Without worthy opponents, even a technically impressive sim can quickly grow tedious.



DESK JOB RED BARON II's main screen gives a new meaning to the term "desktop interface."



BIRD SHOT As planes are hit by ground and air fire, control surfaces may be bent—or blown completely off.

"My goal is to make the AI better than that in FALCON, with the emphasis on dogfighting," Stottlemyer says. "I don't use a lot of silly decision trees with predictable outcomes. I've developed mathematical formulas which yield fluid, constantly updated spatial and conceptual objectives. These are then coupled to a middle AI layer which models the actions a real pilot would take (or not take) to achieve those objectives."

In some sims, AI pilots constantly fly at the edge of their planes' performance envelopes, executing maneuvers with a precision human pilots would find impossible to duplicate. That shouldn't happen here. "The pilot responses are fed into the same flight model that the player is using. The other aircraft are being 'flown'

Target-Rich Environment

The Alpha version of RED BARON II we examined had a surprisingly complete graphics and sound engine, and we were able to get a good feel for what the environment will be like in the final simulation. Although the terrain doesn't look as good as that in EF2000 or FLIGHT UNLIMITED, it's a dramatic improvement over previous Dynamix simulations. Nicely detailed and camouflaged aircraft travel over texture-mapped terrain complete with towns, road networks, airfields, and trenches on the battle lines. Vehicles move from place to place, and if you fly low you'll see ground troops scattering to evade your bullets. (The bullets deserve special note—with small blasts and transparent smoke as you fire at ground targets, RBII has by far the most graphically impressive depiction of strafing yet.)

As aircraft are hit by gunfire or AAA, they'll start streaming semi-transparent smoke and belching flames from their engine compartments. Wings and other control surfaces may be bent, or even blown completely off. Damage is nicely handled by the flight model. Lose part of a wing and that side of the plane will dip from decreased lift; lose your tail and you'll flip end-over-end until you crash.

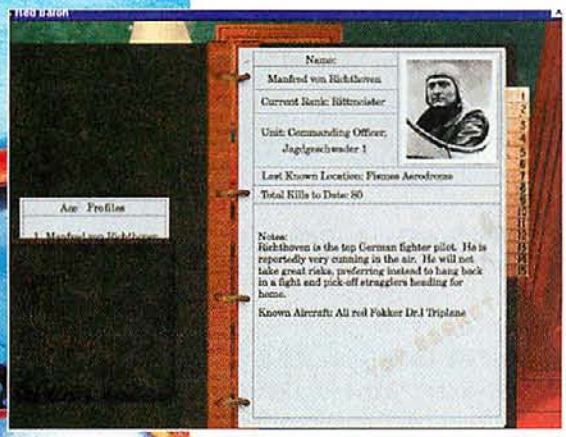
Sound dramatically enhances the environment. As you dive at to attack an airfield, you'll hear the sound of air-raid sirens gradually glow louder. Doppler effects track aircraft as they fly from side-to-side.

Despite the use of the same engine as SILENT THUNDER, the overall effect here is much more convincing, probably because the graphics engine can better handle the rolling hills of Europe than the jagged terrain of Korea.

with the same control inputs the player generates with his joystick," Stottlemyer explains. "You'll never see a plane doing something it can't really do using the flight model.

PATROLLING THE FRONT

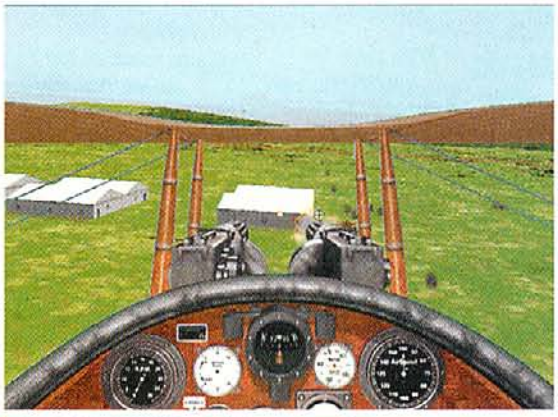
There are numerous arenas for testing your mettle against RBII's AI. Quick Fly is an instant-action mode that starts you in the air in a target-rich environment. There's also a Single Mission mode, but the meat of the action comes in Career Mode. As you gain experience flying sorties with your squadron mates, you'll gain notoriety. Once your name is known, you'll not only be able to challenge enemy aces to duels, but you'll also be challenged *by* them.



ACE VENTURES As you gain experience, you can challenge—or be challenged by—top pilots in your combat theatre.

"The outcomes will affect the player's notoriety, which may help or hinder him when it comes to promotions, flight ratings, and invitations to elite squadrons," Stottlemyer says.

All the mission types found in the original sim will be here, along with some notable additions. Even the classic missions take place in a richer environment. When you fly a balloon-busting mission, you'll see far more attention paid to the front areas where the balloons operated. Expect to find bunkers, machine-gun nests, and artillery pieces on the ground near the balloons, making for a far more interesting—and potentially deadly—combat environment. As you fly Infantry Support missions, you'll encounter moving vehicles and soldiers on the ground, all potential targets. Strafing groups of soldiers running across no-man's-land drives home the fact that this wasn't just a gentlemanly air war between aces.



AIR RAID! As you dive on enemy bases, the wail of air-raid sirens grows progressively louder.

Stottlemyer is quick to point out that the missions you'll fly aren't scripted, as in many other sims. Rather, RBII uses an EF2000-style dynamic mission generator that creates a "living" battlefield. You won't just share the skies with your squadron and its targets. At any time, 50 to 100 missions may be taking place in the world in addition to your own. This means plenty of surprise encounters, as well as lots of targets of opportunity.

MORE TO COME

If your preferred target of opportunity is the guy in the cubicle next door, you'll be happy to know a multiplayer module is in the works. Originally planned as an integral part of the simulation, Sierra/Dynamix has decided to break it out as an add-on package. Two-player modem play is planned, as is network support. The planned mission builder may also end up in an add-on module.

Dynamix is taking the time to do RED BARON II right. Originally slated for release around the end of this summer, the simulation has been pushed back, perhaps as far as Christmas. Although this is disappointing, we'd deal with a delay than end up with a flawed simulation. Given time to implement all the planned mission features, RBII should be as big a move forward for prop sims as EF2000 was for jet simulations. We have our scarves and goggles ready.

Planes Of Fame

The planned list of aircraft includes 22 flyable by the player (all single seat fighters) plus another 16 controlled only by AI pilots (mostly bombers and recon aircraft). In addition, there will be observation balloons and Zeppelins. This list spans the entire war period from 1914 to 1918. Stottlemyer says his team is pushing for quality performance and behavior for each plane, and they'll cut some aircraft from the list rather than sacrifice quality overall if time doesn't permit doing top-notch models for them all.

Flyable:
Airco DH-2
Albatross D.II
Albatross D.II
Albatross D.Va
Fokker D.VII
Fokker Dr.I
Fokker E.III
Haberstadt D.II
Morane Bullet
Nieuport 11
Nieuport 17
Nieuport 24
Nieuport 28
Pfalz D.II
Pfalz D.XII
SE5a
Sopwith Camel
Sopwith Pup
Sopwith Snipe
Sopwith Triplane
SPAD VII
SPAD XIII

Non-Flyable:
Airco DH-4
Albatross C.III
Aviatik C.I
Breguet 14
Caudron G.IV
FE2
Gotha G.IV
Halberstadt CL.II
Handley-Page 0/400
Hannover C.G.III
LVG C.V
Re8
Roland C.II
Rumpler C.IV
Salmson S.2
Sopwith 1-1/2 Strutter

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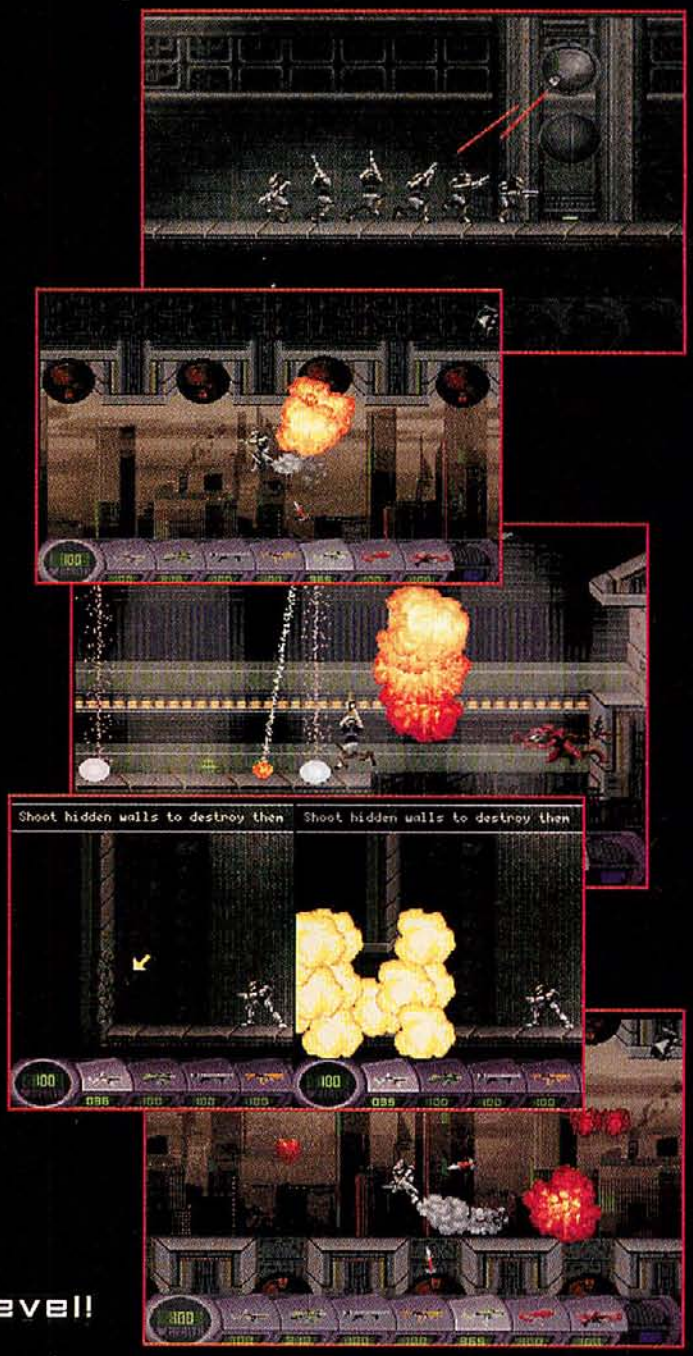
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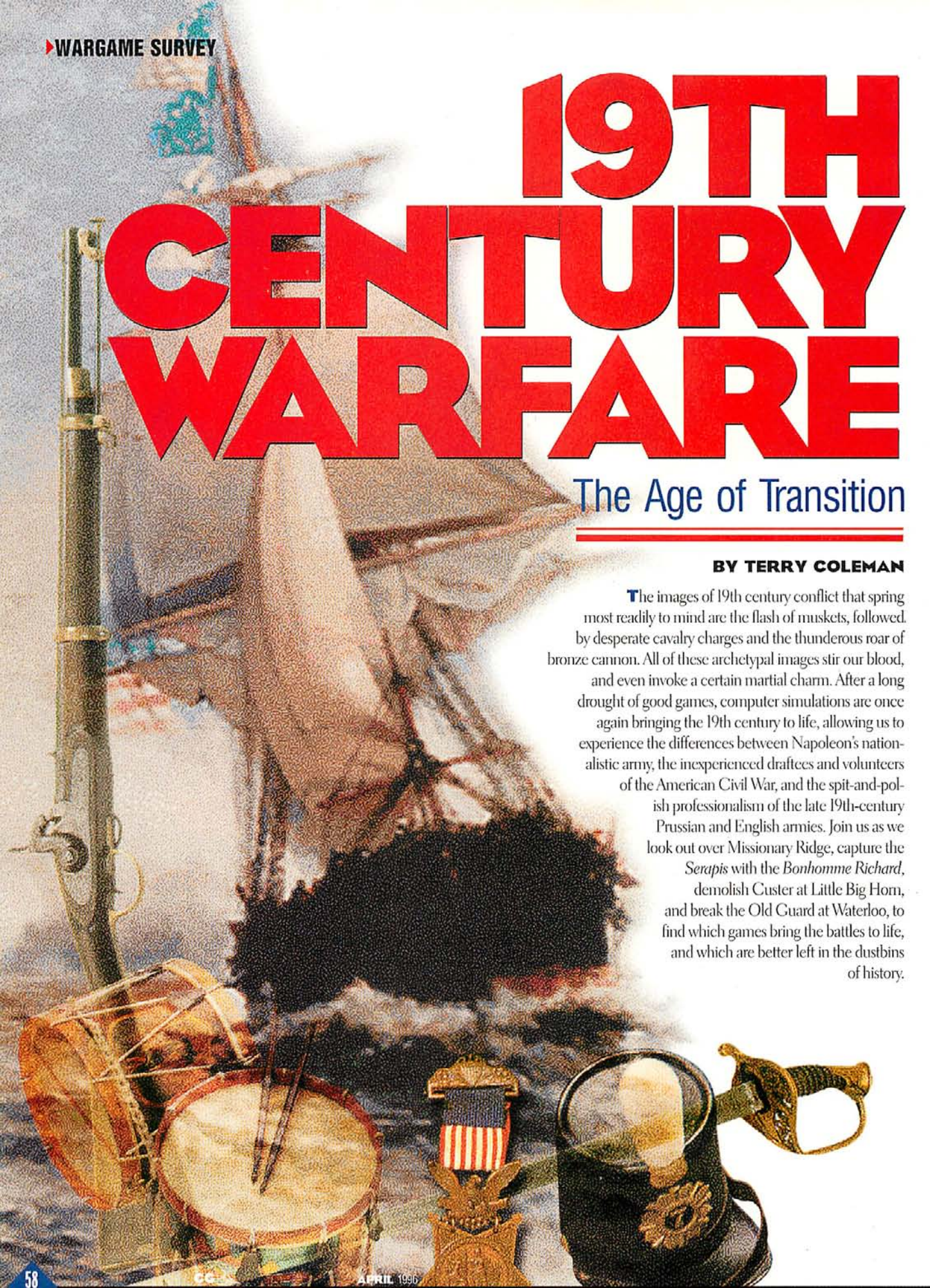
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19TH CENTURY WARFARE

The Age of Transition

BY TERRY COLEMAN

The images of 19th century conflict that spring most readily to mind are the flash of muskets, followed by desperate cavalry charges and the thunderous roar of bronze cannon. All of these archetypal images stir our blood, and even invoke a certain martial charm. After a long drought of good games, computer simulations are once again bringing the 19th century to life, allowing us to experience the differences between Napoleon's nationalistic army, the inexperienced draftees and volunteers of the American Civil War, and the spit-and-polish professionalism of the late 19th-century Prussian and English armies. Join us as we look out over Missionary Ridge, capture the *Serapis* with the *Bonhomme Richard*, demolish Custer at Little Big Horn, and break the Old Guard at Waterloo, to find which games bring the battles to life, and which are better left in the dustbins of history.



AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

The Civil War is a historical period that is embedded in the DNA of all Americans. It thereby holds a fascination far beyond the average wargame. My own family was split asunder, some fighting to defend their beloved Southern states while others were convinced that the only way to save their country was to fight for the Union cause. On a recent trip to the battlefields of Chancellorsville, Fredericksburg, Spotsylvania Court House and other famous sites, I was struck by a particular contrast: an old tree marked the spot where Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson sketched battle plans in the dirt, conceiving their masterful rout of a Union army more than twice their size; in the background loomed a brand-new office park. Ironically, at the same time our national battlefield parks are dwindling in size, the chance to relive those epic struggles through computer simulations is on the upsurge.

The scarcity of Civil War games within the past decade can be attributed to the erroneous belief of publishers that wargames were a dying breed—even though the mediocre Civil War games available sold well (especially every time Ken Burns' epic miniseries, *The Civil War*, was telecast on PBS). The phenomenal sales of PANZER GENERAL proved that accessible wargames with a strong focus were still a viable medium. So, it comes as little surprise that some of the most promising games for '96 share this accessibility. One such is ROBERT E. LEE: CIVIL WAR GENERAL from Sierra (800-757-7707). LEE is much more than just another traditional turn-based wargame. If you look past the hexagonal maps, you see clever arrangements of some of the most famous battles in American history: Antietam, 2nd Bull Run, and of course, Gettysburg. Yet, the heart of the game is in the campaign, which allows Lee, if triumphant at Gettysburg, to invade Washington D.C. Naturally, this battle never actually occurred, but since there was, at least, a reasonable chance of Lee winning at Gettysburg, the designers can hardly be blamed for including the biggest "What-if?" of the Civil War.

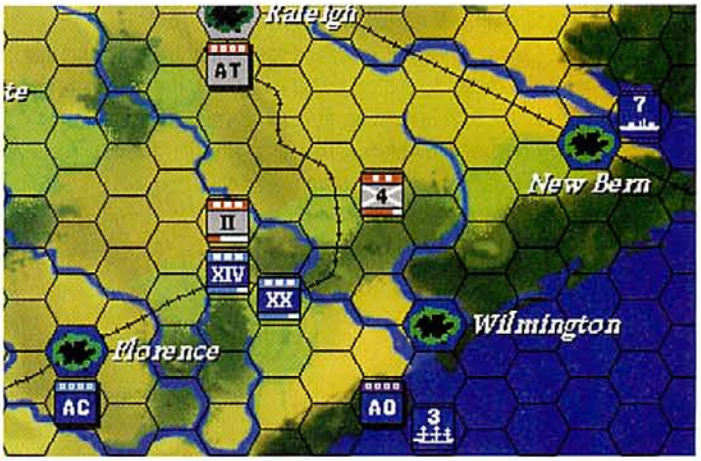
The game system emphasizes morale and training, and is the only game I've ever played from Impressions that makes you believe you really are on a particular historical battlefield. Cannon have the proper deadly effect on massed infantry when fired at short range, and *enfilade* fire, even from small arms, quickly disrupts enemy formations, just as it should. The specific battles require that you master a wide range of tactics: Antietam sends a lumbering Union army against Lee's depleted forces, who fight with desperate energy to avoid being annihilated in a cul-de-sac; Fredericksburg is a nightmare for the Yankees, who bravely throw wave after wave of troops against dug-in Rebels; Gettysburg has everything. The real surprise is that the game system also seems to handle battles where maneuver takes precedence over set-piece assault, such as Chancellorsville. At this point, the AI is still in development, with no assurance that it will match that of say, PG. But if the computer opponent is at all decent, the addition of modem and e-mail play, a fine selection of battles, and the chance to strap on the boots of one of the greatest generals of all time, should make ROBERT E. LEE the best Civil War campaign game ever designed for the computer.

"I HAVE NO ARMY, GENERAL LEE."

If campaigns aren't enough to quench your Civil War thirst, you may wage the entire war through Empire's (800-216-9706) CIVIL WAR, but you're better off passing this game by. The entire scale of the game is off—*daily* turns convert this from an epic struggle to mere minutiae manipulation. If you spend the time training troops, building ships and allocating factory output, you find that it makes very little difference in play, even at the highest levels of "realism." Once you step onto the battlefield, all of the micro-managing becomes superfluous. I have no problem with real-time games *per se*, but CIVIL WAR proves my point that most real-time historical wargames are designed that way because the designers didn't want to bother crafting a real AI. Imagine refighting Gettysburg, where the armies of the Potomac and Northern Virginia—the finest fielded by the Union and Confederacy during the war—both rout and flee from the field of battle simultaneously! If you simply must play a real-time game, WARHAMMER and WARCRAFT II are light-years beyond this.

A much better alternative is THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR: FROM SUMTER TO APPOMATTOX, a new version of Adanac Command Systems' THE ROAD FROM SUMTER TO APPOMATTOX II. Interactive Magic (919-461-0722) is not simply revamping the graphic engine; they are also working closely with Frank Hunter, the original designer, to plug the holes in the AI. The main problem with SUMTER II was that it suffered from schizophrenia: great strategic game; poor tactical module. So, the design team made the tough—and I think, correct—decision to cut back on the detailed battlefield aspects. What this does is free players to make the tough strategic decisions. Do I develop ironclads? Whom do I assign to keep Sherman away from Atlanta? Can Lee invade Maryland while Bragg ties down forces in Ohio and Kentucky, or would I be better off to send Longstreet to Tennessee? Can I afford to leave the inactive McCellan in control, or should I take the political hit and remove him?

Rated for charisma, aggression and tactical ability, the 125 leaders



WHERE'S GRANT WHEN I NEED HIM? If Sherman says "War is Hell" and refuses to move, just replace him with another of over 100 leaders included in THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR: FROM SUMTER TO APPOMATTOX.

included are different enough to provide a great deal of historical flavor without a lot of complex rules. Since the newly-streamlined battle combat system will keep the computer from falling apart on the battlefield, facing a silicon Lee or Jackson across the Potomac now presents much more of a challenge.

The varied political and economic aspects are even more detailed than those of Empire's CIVIL WAR, but are more logically presented, and are much easier to manage in weekly turns. The clunky interface of the original is being redone for Windows 95, and features easy-to-see markers for friendly/enemy forces as well as more multimedia aspects. When you throw in amphibious invasions, control of major rivers, supply, cavalry reconnaissance, and the outside chance that France or England will intervene to stop the conflict, there's more than enough to keep any aficianado priming his Springfield rifle for years to come.

> **"Until Sid Meier gets his Civil War game finished (this century?), THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR: FROM SUMTER TO APPOMATTOX is the only strategic Civil War game worth buying."**

THE VIEW FROM LITTLE ROUND TOP

Of course, if it's a grand battle you require, sir, then you simply must rally around Talonsoft's fine BATTLEGROUND: GETTYSBURG (410-821-7282). ARDENNES, the first in their BATTLEGROUND series, was pretty and easy to play. It was also not that great of a challenge, and somewhat vanilla, because the company played it too safe. GETTYSBURG, however, is a marked improvement, largely because the system works better with 19th- than 20th-century warfare. Historical flavor bursts from each of the 12 scenarios, accentuated by the luscious period maps of artist Charlie Kibler, and some of the best multimedia we've encountered. Flank and enfilade attacks place a premium on proper facing of units, and keeping your various formations supplied is integrated into the design without being over-emphasized.

Leaders, through their command ratings, affect melee and also rally troops. While some gamers may quibble—Longstreet could be lesser-rated, as Gettysburg was hardly his best performance—overall, the leader ratings jibe with their historical legacies. Units fall back and rout fairly realistically, sometimes putting entire battle lines in jeopardy. It is therefore easy to recreate the bitter struggles of Missionary Ridge and Little Round Top. The game allows you to blindly charge, as did Pickett, but it also gives you enough latitude to try historically viable alternatives, such as another flanking maneuver on the final day. Even the 149-turn campaign game manages to hold your attention throughout.

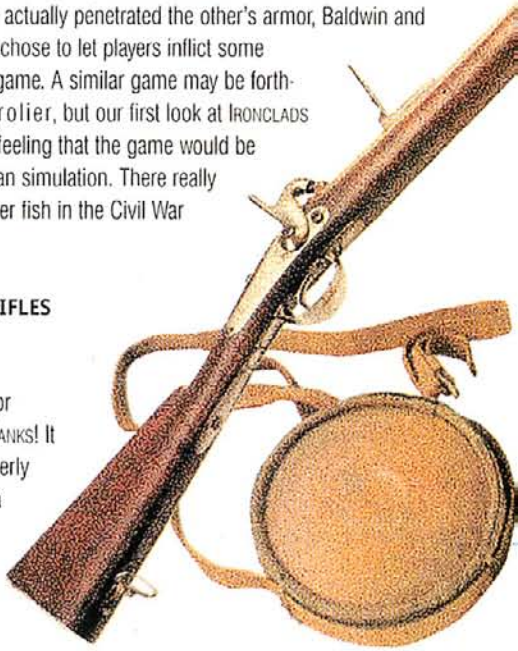
The only real problems with this very enjoyable game are the rules—a step backward from the clarity of ARDENNES—and the lackluster computer opponent. If you set the AI to "semi-automatic" you get a much better game, and GETTYSBURG is excellent for two human generals via modem (no e-mail option, though). So far, Talonsoft has shown a great capacity to learn from their mistakes—which bodes well for SHILOH, the next ACW game in the BATTLEGROUND series.

If fighting but one battle, however epic, leaves you bereft, then you should consider EMPIRE II from New World Computing (818-889-5600). Bob Rakosky and Mark Baldwin have departed from the cozy strategic confines of EMPIRE DELUXE to provide an engine that allows you to refight battles throughout all of history. The system allows for differentiations of technology levels and morale, making it a natural for 19th-century conflict.

For the Civil War, the results are a bit of a mixed bag. *Antietam* is a disappointment: the map just doesn't convey the massive nature of the conflict, and you'll feel that the few turns allowed for play leaves the battle rushing you by. *Shiloh* takes place after the Union forces have been alerted, depriving you of the pleasure of catching the Yankees in their knapsacks. Afterward, however, the battle flows historically enough, with the Rebels fighting desperately to reach Pittsburg Landing before the arrival of Buell and his Union reinforcements. The difficult wooden terrain of Southwest Tennessee is captured quite well, resulting in all kinds of appropriate traffic jams, wild melees, and in general, lots of fun. The designers also get brownie points for including *Hampton Roads,* the famous encounter between the *Monitor* and the *Virginia* (nee *Merrimac*), the first two ironclad vessels. While the two ships never actually penetrated the other's armor, Baldwin and Rakosky wisely chose to let players inflict some damage in the game. A similar game may be forthcoming from Grolier, but our first look at IRONCLADS left us with the feeling that the game would be more arcade than simulation. There really aren't many other fish in the Civil War seas.

THE AGE OF RIFLES

I must admit—I didn't care much for Norm Koger's TANKS! It struck me as overly ambitious, like a sandwich with so many

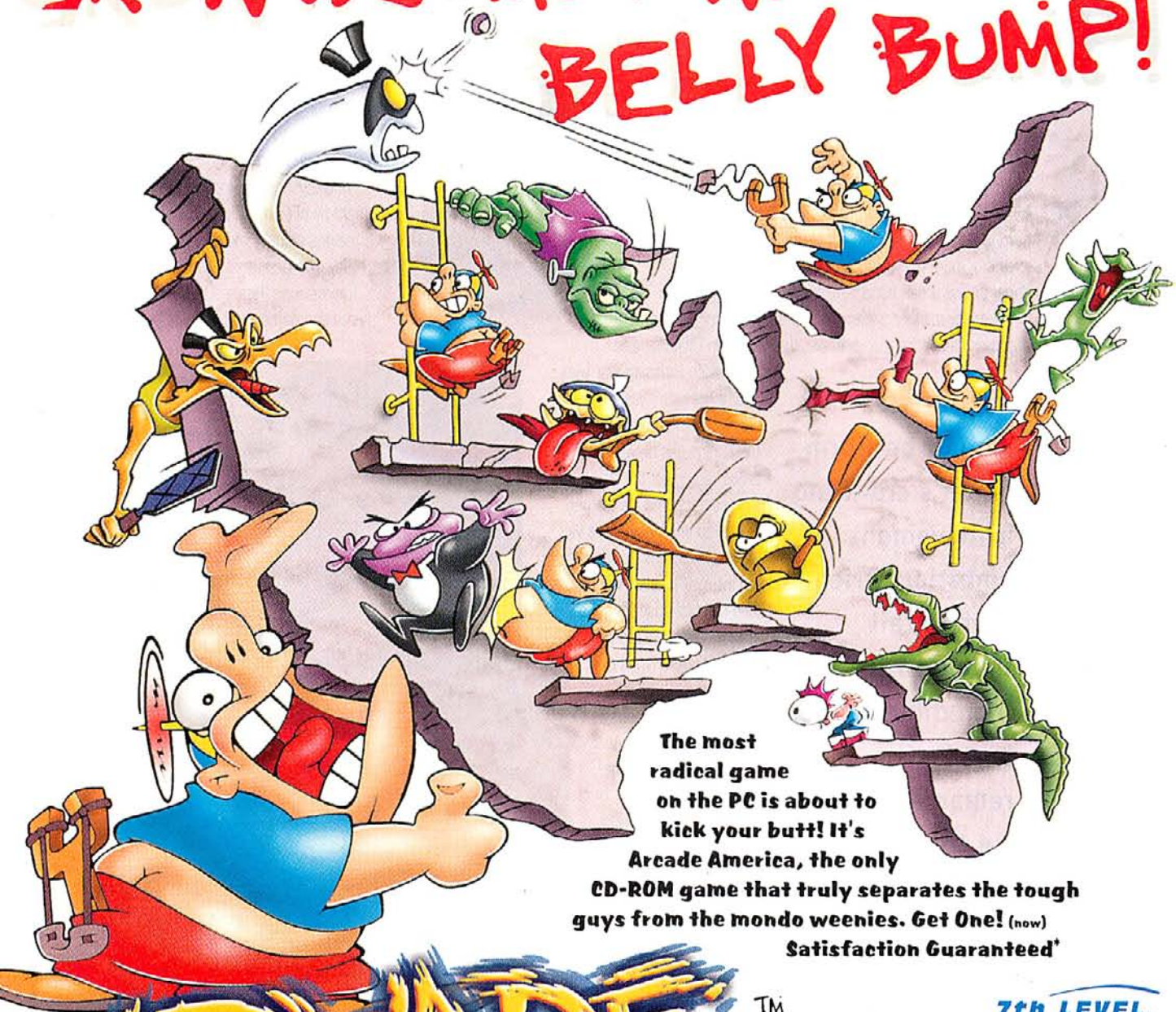


Boardgame Alternatives



The renaissance in Civil War computer games is cause for celebration, but if you want some cutting-edge gaming, consider *April Harvest* (Shiloh), part of the *Brigade Series* from a boardgame company aptly titled **The Gamers** (217-896-2145). The command and battlefield chaos rules simply can't be beat. For other Civil War gaming alternatives, check out our CG-ROM.

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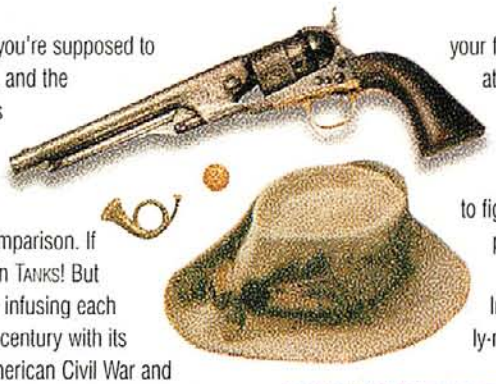
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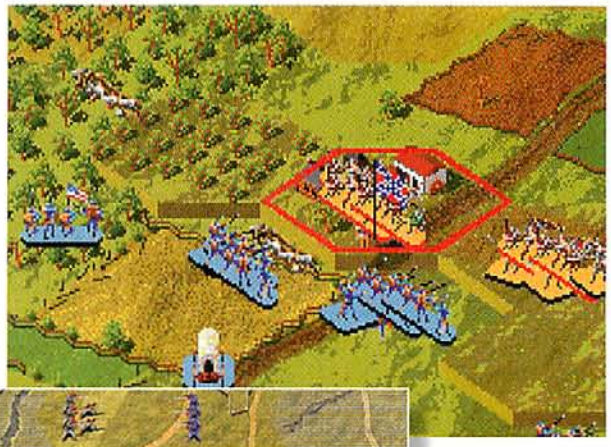


condiments you forget exactly what it is you're supposed to be eating. The morale rules were bizarre, and the combat system unsatisfying. Having thus bared my bias, I must admit that SSI's (408-737-6800) AGE OF RIFLES (WARGAME CONSTRUCTION SET III), is so far beyond Koger's other work as to defy comparison. If anything, there is even more detail than in TANKS! But Koger shows a deft hand here, somehow infusing each of the major military systems of the 19th century with its own individual style. For example, the American Civil War and the Franco-Prussian War were only a few scant years apart, yet RIFLES! effortlessly shows the differences between the volunteer armies of the Union and Confederacy, and the leather-bootstrap efficiency of the victorious Prussians.

> **"RIFLES! should be Norm Koger's crowning achievement: ambitious, rich with detail, imbued with an incredible range, laced with remarkably subtle touches of both history and challenging gameplay."**

Civil War fanatics will have a field day just absorbing the cornucopia of weapons data. A dozen different types of small arms are available, including such exotics as shotguns and Spencer repeating carbines. The mortars, artillery and cannon vary from the puny 8-inch Columbiad to the devastating 20-pound Parrot Gun. Units usually represent medium-sized formations, such as brigades, which are rated for fire strength, melee, leadership, morale and supply. Advanced rules allow you to deploy skirmishers, change formation (line, march column, attack column, line, supported line, square, rest, entrench), and even to give units automatic reaction orders (a wonderful alternative to micro-managing). Flanking, communications, supply, hidden units, and random events (smoke, fire, etc.) are all tied together for the best 19th-century—and Civil War—battle feel yet. This is the first time I've seen stragglers adequately simulated in a Civil War game without overburdening the players. Yet, with all this detail, RIFLES! keeps the victory conditions simple: wipe out the enemy's troops, and control his objectives; it sounds a lot like the advice Lincoln kept giving his generals.

The Civil War battles available in RIFLES! simply blow away the competition. I could have lived without Williamsburg or Franklin, but Bull Run, Fair Oaks, Five Forks, Corinth, Stones River and South Mountain (to name but a few of the *21* Civil War scenarios planned), are as good a tour of the Civil War as you could possibly ask for. What's more, if your favorite Civil War battle isn't included, just create your own with the powerful scenario editor; it lets you save and edit orders of battle, so that you can see how Lee might have fared at Gettysburg if Stonewall Jackson had lived to fight by his side. Also, if the promised campaigns actually materialize, then we may have, say, *The Genius of Ulysses S. Grant* to counter Impressions' ROBERT E. LEE. For any historically-minded gamer, that's a nice problem to have.







3 DAYS AT GETTYSBURG Missionary Ridge is consistently the key to winning, even given the slightly different scales of BATTLEGROUND: GETTYSBURG, ROBERT E. LEE and RIFLES!

Almost Decisive

DECISIVE BATTLES OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR is again available in TWENTY WARGAME CLASSICS (see page 183). A pioneer in computer wargames, the DECISIVE BATTLES series broke away from many of the board game conventions of the day, particularly in the areas of communication and command control. It's rather dated, and not the classic that BATTLES OF NAPOLEON is, but still worth a look.

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5
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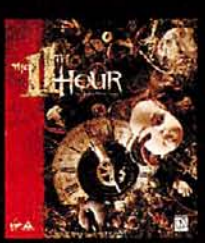
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You can stop grieving now. The 11th Hour has finally arrived. This PC CD-ROM game fuses incredible 3-D graphics and mind-numbing challenges



with a full-length psychological thriller. It's also 12 times bigger and two CDs longer than its predecessor, The 7th Guest. So, is The 11th Hour really worth the wait? Well, we think it's totally killer.

TRILOBYTE



Circle Reader Service #185

FROM SEA TO SHINING SEA

If we are to believe most computer wargame publishers, U.S. military history began with the American Revolution and skipped straight to the Civil War. Thankfully, a small company called Incredible Simulations (HPS: 408-554-8381) reminds us that there were important American conflicts both before and after The War Between the States. REMEMBER THE ALAMO is a tense, yet totally unpretentious wargame. Obviously a labor of love, it hides its low-budget production values with a clever use of digitized video clips of Mexican and Texan re-enactment troop footage. The game is tough to win: as in the real world, help almost never comes swiftly enough to save the beleagured Alamo garrison; and even the Tennessee long rifles can't hold the vastly superior Mexican army at bay forever. Travis, Bowie, and all the other great leaders (short of John Wayne) are here to add their strengths to melee and morale. Surprisingly replayable, and a nice reminder of a near-forgotten heritage.



TAME THE WILD WIND Sometimes you just wake up with the urge to rake an enemy ship in WOODEN SHIPS & IRON MEN.

CG ON-LINE Alan Emrich's CUSTER'S LAST COMMAND strategy article is a **CG Web exclusive.** http://www.zd.com/~gaming

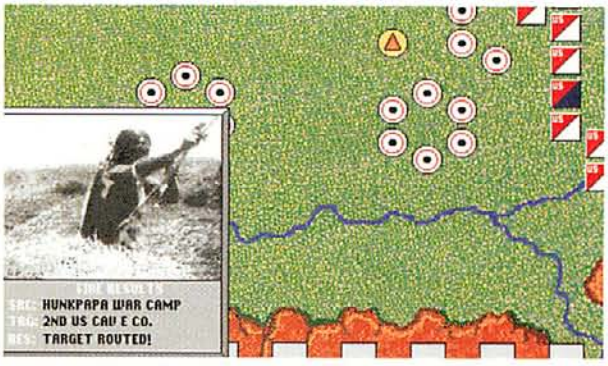
CUSTER'S LAST COMMAND develops the Incredible style, adding improved graphics and a friendlier interface. The controversial Custer and his famed 7th Cavalry are pitted against Sitting Bull in a number of scenarios, with tons of options. Should Custer swallow his pride and ask the 2nd Cavalry to tag along near Little Bighorn, or will taking a Gatling gun offer enough support? The combat system is much more sophisticated than in ALAMO, making the game quite viable for two players (the rumor that I have scalped Custer 10 times is unworthy of comment). A very good game on a controversial subject.



AGE OF RIFLES! breaks the Incredible monopoly on obscure American Wars with four battles from the Mexican-American War: Palo Alto, Buena Vista, Monterey and Pt. Isabel. And there's even a scenario planned for Little Big Horn, although the RIFLES! system seems less appropriate here than that of CUSTER'S LAST COMMAND.

CROSSING THE "T"

One neglected area of American history in wargames is 19th-century naval actions. Avalon Hill's first attempt at WOODEN SHIPS & IRON MEN (for the old C-64) was a ship that sank quickly, and Simcan's MAN OF WAR was accurate, but lacked excitement. So, who should come to the rescue then but Stanley Associates (5TH FLEET)? Stanley has teamed with AH for a remake of WOODEN SHIPS (800-999-3222) fine enough to make even Admiral Nelson stand at attention. All of the rich detail of the board game is here: canister, solid and chain shot; full, battle or mid-sail; boarding parties, crew allocation and quality; changing wind guages; every major vessel in the U.S. and European navies; even a campaign game where you get to play John Paul Jones in the War of 1812. The simultaneously-plotted turn-based action allows you to command more than one ship, and the interface helps keep the complexity manageable. If you've ever been fascinated by ships-of-the-line, this is the tall-masted vessel you've been waiting to sail.



SIOUX CITY CUSTER'S LAST COMMAND features a tough computer opponent and bitter fighting around Indian villages.

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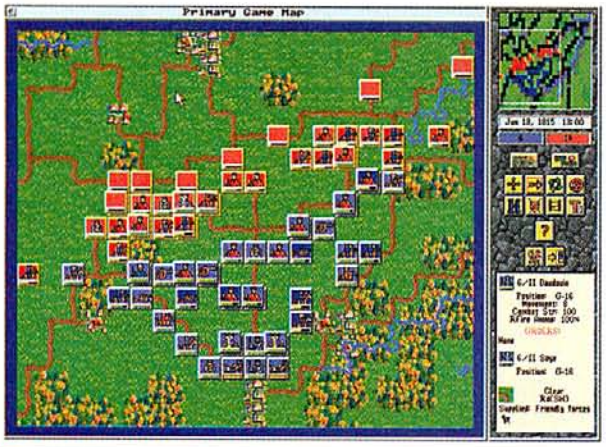
And grab the rock-bottom rate other gamers would virtually die for!

THE ART OF NAPOLEON

Less elegant than Lee, hardly a god like Alexander, and certainly not as ruthless as Genghis Khan, Napoleon Bonaparte has been given shorter shrift in computer wargaming than even his diminutive height would seem to warrant. All he did was take the concept of maneuver along interior lines made famous by Frederick the Great and elevate it to a military art form. Until he ran into the Russian winter and then Wellington, *Le Petit General* was unstoppable, crushing the Austrians, Prussians, Russians and all other comers for nearly a decade. Napoleon's masterpiece, Austerlitz—where the Emperor left his center open to attack, that he might crush his enemies on either flank—is aptly re-enacted in the recently reissued BATTLES OF NAPOLEON (SSI). A good AI and a fine balance between playability and realism keep this fresh—if you can get past the CGA graphics. In any case, you'll have a lot of fun massing artillery and rushing to form squares versus the well-timed computer cavalry charges.



For Waterloo, you have a few more choices. EMPIRE II does a nice, if simple, job of showing how the outnumbered Anglo-Allies under Wellington held out until the Prussians appeared on Napoleon's right flank. Overall, it is a lot like the old *Napoleon at Waterloo* board game (SPI). *Austerlitz* is also fun, but less detailed than in BATTLES OF NAPOLEON. It's really impossible to



GETTING GROUCHY One of the greatest "what-ifs" in all of military history is recreated in EMPIRE II's *Waterloo 2* scenario, where Marshall Grouchy is available to stave off the Prussians.

engender enough mystery to mask the massing of French troops around Zuran Hill, but the hidden unit rules do help.

At least, EMPIRE II achieves its modest goals. That is more than can be said for Spectrum HoloByte's FIELDS OF GLORY (510-522-1164). Gorgeous graphics and a nice tabletop miniatures feel make you yearn to

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play this game. Try to resist, because the AI is simply one of the worst of all time, so bad that you can sit and do absolutely nothing as the British—and still win the game! Crack troops are reduced to sniveling, disorganized ruffians—simply by marching 50 yards. This game is best left permanently in bivouac.

Cavalry Recon

With the excellent 19th century model of AGE OF RIFLES! covering only the period from 1848 onward, Napoleonic buffs will have to content themselves with games geared toward lighter complexity. BATTLEGROUND: WATERLOO will extend the popular series, with a renewed emphasis on melee, cavalry charges and troop quality, according to **Talonsoft**. Meanwhile, **Avalon Hill** is finally converting its old *Waterloo* board game to the computer. This "move, fight and be damned" game is perfectly suited for e-mail. But even with the Emperor's finest dressed up in crisp graphics, it's still a 30-year-old board game design. I have too many fond memories from my youth of shoving cardboard counters toward La Haye Sainte for me to be unduly critical; yet I suspect this game will be played mainly for nostalgia's sake by hoary old board wargamers like me. Maybe AH will finally see fit to do *Empires in Arms* for the computer. We can only hope...

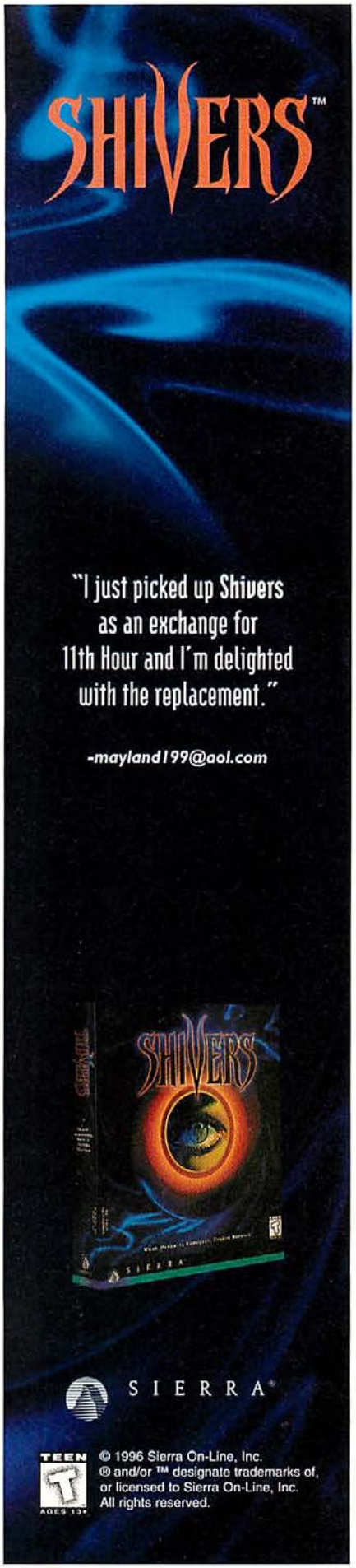
SOLDIERS OF THE QUEEN

Sure, the Romans controlled "the known world" and the Mongols conquered a greater area of sheer land mass, but the British exerted their laws and military might over a greater number of diverse peoples and territories than any other empire in all of history. Whether you agree with Gandhi that the British overstayed their welcome, or with Toynbee that they brought civilization to far-flung areas of the world, AGE OF RIFLES! allows you to further your own fantasy geo-political agendas with a "Soldiers of the Queen" campaign.

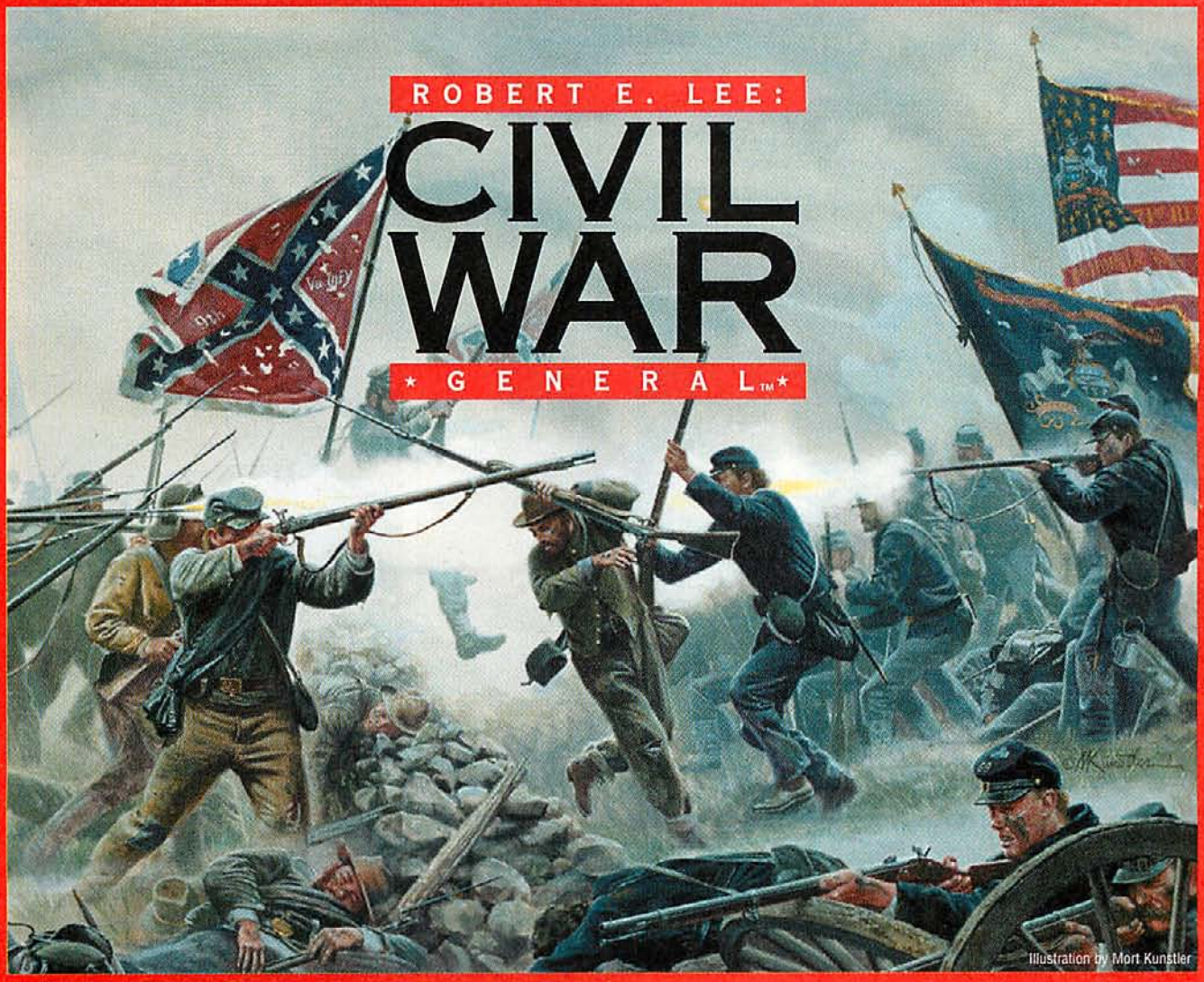
As a commander in Her Majesty's Army, you find that the British, at one time or another, fought practically everybody. After putting down uprisings in India, for example, you are just as likely to be called away to subjugate the Chinese in the Boxer Rebellion, or to fight the Arabs to reinstate your puppet governor in Arabia. Individual scenarios pit you against: the Russians at Balaclava, where you may relive the Charge of the Light Brigade; Khartoum, where the siege was lifted too late to save the desert garrison; Omdurman, where the superior British technology saved the day against the "fuzzy-wuzzies," and others ranging from the obvious to the obscure.



Of particular interest is the campaign against the Zulus, where the African tribes must brave a gauntlet of small arms and Maxim machine gun fire, so that their superior strength in numbers may be brought to bear against the technologically superior English. In addition to the famous battles of Isandlwana and Ulundi, RIFLES! also plans to include Holobane and Khambula. ZULUWAR! by Incredible Simulations focuses



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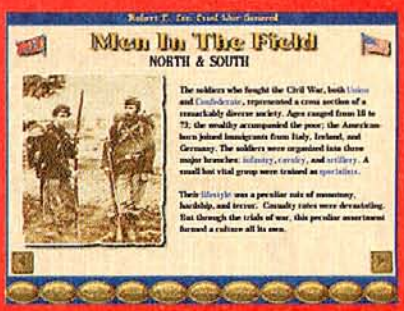
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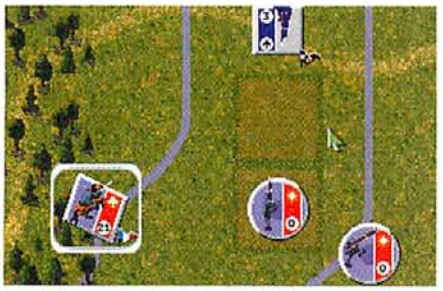
RP

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more on the Zulus' amazing ablilty to march at rapid speeds for days on end, and still have plenty of energy left for battle. Ammunition, command control, unit cohesion and morale are the keys to victory in this contrast between two successful, but very different, military systems.

RULE BRITANNIA!

That the sun eventually set on the British Empire, doesn't change the tremendous rush which gamers get from carving out an empire or desperately defending your homeland against the imperialistic Western nations. The conflicts of the 19th century set the stage for even more terrible world wars in the 20th, but they also displayed the last vestiges of a dying chivalry, before fully automated and electronic weaponry turned the individual soldier into a cipher. Whether you play these games to see if Lee really could have changed the course of the Civil War; to determine if Santa Ana got a bad rap versus the Texans; simply because you enjoy good wargames, we hope this tour of a bygone era helps your recon efforts. Until our next major walk through history, good gaming.



ENGLISH BREAKFAST Although it sounds like a Middle Eastern dessert, the only thing flaky about Balaclava is that suicidal cavalry charge.

A 19th Century Military Tour

Game	Scale	Difficulty	Conflicts	# Scenarios	Campaign?	Win95	Editor?	Graphics	Realism
ACW: Sumter to Appomattox	Strategic	Medium	Civil War	N/A	Yes	Yes	No	B+	A-
Age of Tactical Rifles	Grand	Medium	All but Napoleonic	36*	Yes	No	Yes	B	A
Battleground: Gettysburg	Grand Tactical	Medium	Civil War	3	Yes	Yes	No	A-	B
Battles of Napoleon	Grand Tactical	Easy	Napoleonic	4@	No	No	Yes	D	A-
Custer's Last Command	Tactical	Medium	Indian Wars	5	No	No	No	B+	A-
Empire II	Grand Tactical	Easy	All	16	No	No	Yes	B	C+
Fields of Glory	Tactical	Medium	Napoleonic	6	No	No	No	A-	D
Remember the Alamo!	Tactical	Easy	Mexican War	2	No	No	No	B-	B-
Robert E. Lee	Operational	Medium	Civil War	12	Yes	Yes	No	A	A-
The Civil War	Strategic	Medium	Civil War	4	Yes	No	No	C-	F
Wooden Ships & Iron Men	Tactical	Advanced	Naval/1812	15	Yes	No	Yes	A	A+

* = Based on best information available at press time; Norm just keeps adding new battles.
@ = The original BoN has 4 battles, but there are over 4 dozen scenarios available from Novastar Games.

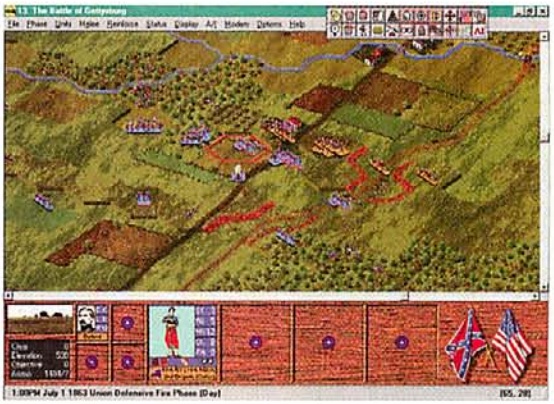


Circle Reader Service #153

All In A Day's War

Revisiting BATTLEGROUND: GETTYSBURG's Decisive First Day

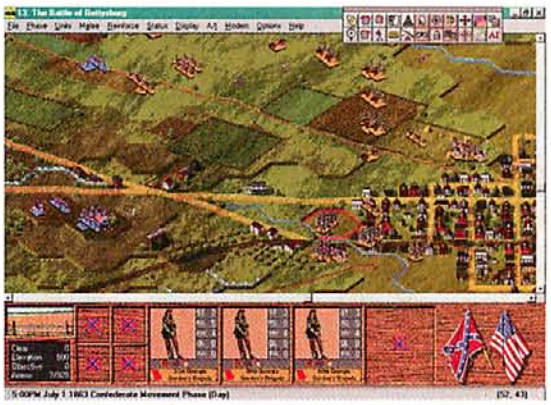
by Patrick C. Miller



KEEP 'EM AT BAY By building breastworks and using reverse slope tactics at McPherson's Ridge, the Union cavalry can delay the Confederate advance for hours.

July 1, 1863, was a day on which many fateful decisions were made, decisions that had profound effects on the outcome of the battle of Gettysburg and the American Civil War. With TalonSoft's BATTLEGROUND: GETTYSBURG, wargamers can refight the entire three-day battle and attempt to rewrite history. Whether you play the Union or the Confederate side, your performance on the battle's opening day will probably determine the outcome over the next two days. Therefore, it's important to start off on the right foot and avoid the mistakes the real commanders made, while exploiting the opportunities they missed.

Historical accounts say that General Robert E. Lee, unsure of the Union army's exact location, was drawn into a battle on ground of the enemy's choosing. Hesitant at first to become embroiled in a large engagement, Lee grew more confident as the day wore on, when it became clear that he had caught the Union Army of the Potomac at a disadvantage. Unfortunately, one of Lee's commanders, Lieutenant General Richard Ewell, was not eager to capitalize on the opportunity before him and, as the sun set, the crucial high ground to the south of Gettysburg remained in enemy hands. For the next two days, the Army of Northern Virginia danced to the Yankees' tune, smashing itself against Union troops occupying strong positions anchored on Culp's Hill, Cemetery Hill and Little Round Top.



VICTORY CONDITIONS As Confederate commander, you'll be rewarded with a lightly defended Cemetery Hill if you quickly smash the Union XI Corps and maintain a rapid advance.

On the Union side, Brigadier General John Buford is credited with recognizing the value of the excellent defensive terrain around Gettysburg and deploying his cavalry division to delay the Confederate advance on the small Pennsylvania town. His troopers held long enough for reinforcements to arrive and further delay the enemy advance. Although the results of the first day's fighting clearly favored the Confederates, the Union troops fought well enough to give Ewell pause, and he decided against advancing beyond Gettysburg to seize the high ground. The newly appointed commander of the Army of the Potomac, Major General George Meade, made certain that Buford's efforts were not in vain when he ordered his army to concentrate at Gettysburg, thus setting the stage for the bloody clash on July 2 and Pickett's climactic charge on July 3.

WHISTLIN' DIXIE: REBEL STRATEGY

In BATTLEGROUND: GETTYSBURG, as the Confederate commander, you know far more about what to expect than Robert E. Lee. You must be bold and aggressive from the start, constantly probing the enemy lines for weaknesses, taking advantage of any openings you discover and pushing your troops inexorably forward to the heights south of Gettysburg. Failure to capture the key points of Culp's Hill and Cemetery Hill on the first day will not necessarily doom you to defeat, but it will make your task over the next two days more difficult, just as it did for Lee. By capturing these positions, you'll turn the tables on the Union and force its troops to attack up the slopes that proved so deadly in the real battle.

The Confederate's greatest advantage on the first day was its superior numbers. The Union has a lot of ground to defend and doesn't have enough units to do it properly. Rather than attacking Buford's cavalry head-on at McPherson's Ridge west of Gettysburg, extend your line outwards on both flanks until you find an end to the Union line. While

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Taken a fashion risk	☐	☐
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keeping the cavalry occupied to its front, shift your units around a flank to turn and envelop the enemy line. Using this tactic, you can quickly dispatch successive lines of Union defenders at minimal cost as they attempt to defend north and west of Gettysburg.

Speed is the key for the Confederate force. Use the least force necessary to eliminate weakened Union units. Keep as many of your regiments as possible in column and advancing. Firepower is preferable to melee when conducting combat, because melee disrupts your units and cuts their movement points in half, slowing your advance. Don't become preoccupied with setting up your artillery to conduct a classic bombardment prior to assaulting an enemy line. It will only slow you down.



REWRITING HISTORY Don't repeat history; instead of attacking the Union line across its width, attack down its length to expand the Rebel foothold on Cemetery Ridge.

A CRUSHING BLOW

When Ewell's II Corps arrives northeast of Gettysburg at 12:40 p.m., use it as a dagger in your enemy's side. Although this corps has a great deal of distance to cover, its regiments are well positioned to outflank the right end of the Union line, which lies in mostly flat, open terrain and is defended by low-quality troops. You have the troop quality and numbers to quickly and easily shatter the Union right flank. Once accomplished, follow up your success with a rapid advance through and to the east of Gettysburg. Be sure to put your regiments in column before entering the town or they will become disrupted, slowing your progress. If you've advanced fast enough, you'll find Culp's Hill undefended and only a few enemy regiments on Cemetery Hill, making it relatively easy to capture.

Consider attacking down the length of Cemetery Ridge toward Ziegler's Grove, if there's enough daylight left (sunset is at 8 p.m.) and you have units that are relatively strong and fresh. Units from A.P. Hill's III Corps can swing southward to cover Ewell's right flank while Culp's Hill anchors his left flank. Be careful not to get too ambitious. The Union will continue to receive reinforcements from the south and southeast throughout the evening and into the night. The safer strategy is to consolidate your gains, dig in and prepare to repel Union counterattacks in the morning.

UNION-MADE STRATEGY

As the Union commander on Gettysburg's first day, you must be willing to trade space for time. And even though you are significantly outnumbered, it is possible to inflict heavy casualties on the enemy while fighting a delaying action. Buford's cavalry, supported by a few artillery batteries and the excellent regiments of the Iron Brigade from I Corps, are capable of holding up the Confederate attack west of Gettysburg for hours longer than they actually did. The wooded terrain, railroad cuts and ridge lines west of the town give you good defensive terrain from which to fight.

Don't deploy your troops on top of McPherson's Ridge. Your cavalry

Small Arms Effectiveness

Weapon Type (abbreviation)	Range In Hexes				
	1	2	3	4	5
Breech-Loading Rifle (B)	8	4	2	1	0
Carbine (C)	8	3	1	0	0
Smoothbore Musket (M)	6	1	0	0	0
Pistol (P)	1	0	0	0	0
Rifled Musket (R)	4	2	1	1	1
Spencer Repeating Rifle (S)	12	8	3	2	1

Artillery Effectiveness

Weapon Type (abbreviation)	Range In Hexes										
	1	2	3	4	5	6-8	9	10-12	13-15	16-20	21-70
12-Pounder Howitzer (H)	12	6	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0
12-Pounder Napoleon (N)	12	6	3	2	2	2	1	1	1	0	0
Rifled Cannon (T)	9	6	3	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	0
12-Pounder Whitworth (W)	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

The numbers refer to a weapon's effectiveness at the given range.

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carbines have a range of only three hexes compared to five for the Confederate's rifled muskets. Troops on top of the ridge will be picked apart by Confederate small arms and artillery fire very quickly. Instead, deploy your cavalry just behind the ridge and order it to build breastworks. When reinforcements from the I Corps arrive, extend your line to both flanks and build as many breastworks as possible before the Confederate infantry attacks in full force. Using reverse-slope tactics, you can exact a heavy toll on Rebel units as they crest the ridge or attempt to advance through the railroad cut.



LOST CAUSE Don't be preoccupied with the victory hexes; it's better for the Union commander to retreat and wait for reinforcements, rather than trying to hold onto Oak Hill.

The key to successfully holding up the Confederate attack is to avoid over-extending your defensive line and knowing when to stay and when to go. If the Confederates do outflank you (and they probably will at some point), you should pull back to avoid having your line turned and enveloped. It's more important that you keep a force intact between the Confederate army and the heights south of Gettysburg than it is to sacrifice units in defense of objective hexes that can't be held. For example, attempting to hold the objective hex on Oak Hill northwest of Gettysburg will greatly overextend your line and set you up for an overwhelming Rebel attack.

The next Union reinforcement to arrive at Gettysburg is the XI Corps. Knowing that the greatest damage to the Army of the Potomac was caused by Ewell's II Corps attacking from the north and northwest, most of the XI Corps should be deployed to meet that threat. You don't have much to work with to stop Ewell's attack. About all that you can realistically hope for with the Union XI Corps is to force the Confederates to deploy into line and slow down their advance. You don't need the entire corps to do this. At least one brigade should be left on Cemetery Hill—along with some artillery—to immediately begin building breastworks. The rest of the corps should be deployed five to six hexes north of Gettysburg with its flanks extending as far east and west as possible.

Tactical Tips for Battleground: Gettysburg

- **Leaders** Help your leaders live longer by dismounting them when under fire. The presence of leaders benefits your troops in melee, reduces their chances of becoming disrupted or routed, and helps lift disruption or rout status.
- **Organization** Regiments belong to brigades, brigades belong to divisions and divisions belong to corps. Splitting up commands weakens organizational cohesion and leads to units becoming disrupted or routed more easily. Right clicking on any unit opens a dialog box showing its place in the army's organization. You can also toggle the icon that highlights unit bases to show all units within the same organization.
- **Supply** Running out of ammunition is one of the worst things that can happen to your army. Position your supply wagons a few hexes behind infantry heavily engaged in combat. The number of artillery rounds available to your army is shown in the terrain information box at the lower left corner of the screen. You can capture and use enemy supply wagons by engaging them in melee.
- **Artillery** Site artillery on high ground behind your infantry line, enabling it to fire over friendly troops. Before unlimbering your artillery, click on the line of sight icon to determine which hexes the battery can see from that location. Trees sometimes obscure your field of vision more than it appears.
- **Reinforcements** If you're not sure when and where your reinforcements arrive, find "Reinforce" in the pull-down menu and select "Scheduled." This opens a dialog box showing the names of each division and brigade, its time of arrival and the hex in which it will arrive. Clicking on any unit in the listing scrolls the map to the spot where that unit will enter the map.

ADVANCE TO THE REAR

When the pressure on the Union right flank becomes too great, and the XI Corps begins to crumble, don't waste time or units attempting to salvage the situation. Start pulling the regiments back through Gettysburg and toward Cemetery Hill and Culp's Hill before their position becomes completely untenable. Your goal at this point is to minimize casualties that add to the Confederate's victory point total. When the XI Corps retreats, what remains of Buford's cavalry division and the I Corps should fall back toward Cemetery Ridge to avoid becoming trapped between Hill's and Ewell's corps.

Late in the afternoon, elements of the Union XII Corps will begin to arrive from the south and southeast. These regiments should be used to garrison Culp's Hill and fill in the area between that hill and Cemetery Hill. Carefully position your artillery batteries on the high ground to sweep the southern edge of Gettysburg and the open terrain between Cemetery Ridge and Seminary Ridge. Have your infantry take advantage of the numerous stone walls around Cemetery Hill and build breastworks where no walls exist. Building breastworks on and around the peak of Culp's Hill will make that position a tough nut to crack.

When the Confederates pursue the remnants of the I and XI corps through Gettysburg and to the bottom of Cemetery Hill, they should come face to face with your dug-in infantry occupying a multilayered defensive position well supported by artillery. This time, Ewell will have good reason to pause and, if he doesn't, you'll be in an excellent position to repulse a Confederate attack. As Union reinforcements continue to trickle in during the evening and night, you should use these units to dig in along the length of Cemetery Ridge, extending toward Little Round Top to form Meade's classic fish hook-shaped defensive position. From then on, the rest should be history.

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GAMING FOR ROAD WARRIORS

Should Your Next Game PC Be A Laptop? A Look At How Portable Pentiums Stack Up

BY DENNY ATKIN



Once upon a time, laptops and gaming were mutually exclusive. Now, the situation is radically different. Pentium-class portables, fully equipped with sound and CD-ROM, can be found for $2,400 on up. While price isn't yet on par with desktop PCs—you still pay a premium for portability—performance is. Today's laptops sport local-bus video and mobile Pentium processors running at up to 133 MHz—certainly enough oomph for all but the most demanding gamers.

ROUNDING 'EM UP

We took a look at the current crop of portable PCs and picked five systems ranging from economy laptops to no-holds-barred performance machines. With desktop PCs, the best choice is usually the fastest machine you can afford. With notebook PCs, though, there many factors to take into account. Is portability the main concern, or battery life? Are you a strategy gamer who'll be happy with a slower-updating dual-scan screen, or do you need an active-matrix display that can keep up with sims and action games? Read on, and you'll be able to determine which laptops meet your needs.

To be included in this roundup, notebooks needed a Pentium-class processor, sound support, and an integrated CD-ROM drive. Because we were testing systems running Windows 95, we requested notebooks equipped with at least 16 MB of RAM. We tested a mix of dual-scan and active-matrix screens in order to gauge performance differences between display types.

MOBILE MUSCLE

Today's mobile multimedia systems share a common feature set. Most ship standard with 8 MB of RAM; because they all also ship with Windows 95, we recommend bumping them up to 16 MB for best performance. Hard drives range in size from 520 MB up to 1.2 GB, and each unit includes a bay which can hold an internal CD-ROM drive or floppy drive. SoundBlaster-compatible sound and an internal speaker are standard fare, as are serial, parallel, keyboard/mouse, and monitor ports. All but one include IrDA infrared serial ports, while only one included a joystick port. Two Type 2 PC-Card (formerly PCMCIA) expansion sockets (which can together hold one Type 3 card) are standard on each unit.

It's what's inside the cases that makes notebooks cost so much more than their desktop counterparts. Size and power restrictions demand innovative compact, low-power components. The Pentium-based units use Intel Mobile Pentium processors, which run at 2.9 volts instead of the standard 3.3 V, and which support special power-saving modes. Some of the notebooks do away with power-hungry Level 2 processor caches in order to conserve battery life, using EDO RAM and other methods in an effort to make up for the performance loss. LCD screens are another big expense, as are the battery power systems.

You'll find two battery styles, Nickel-Metal Hydride (NiMH) and Lithium-Ion (LI); NiCad batteries are a thing of the past. Lithium-Ion battery packs offer longer life—over four hours for light word-processing use, compared to around two hours for NiMH—as well as "smart-battery" circuitry which gives a precise reading on how much power is left. You'll pay a price for the increased memory life, though, as the typical spare LI battery pack costs about $200, double that of an NiMH pack.

One thing you may not initially think to look for when purchasing a notebook is a real-mode driver for the CD-ROM drive. Without this, you won't be able to access the CD-ROM drive when you reboot Win95 into MS-DOS Exclusive Mode to play troublesome DOS games. All of the units reviewed here shipped with real-mode CD-ROM drivers, but some machines don't. (Early TI Extensa units didn't include real-mode drivers, but the company now ships them with new systems.)

THE PORTABLE PENALTY

All of the systems we looked at were more than suitable as game machines, but certain portability compromises may make them less-than-optimum choices for some demanding gamers. Although all of these notebooks use local-bus video, their displays still can't hold a candle, speed-wise, to their desktop counterparts. The lack of a separate numeric keypad can hamper play in some games, but all the units support plugging in a full-size external keyboard. Notebooks are a bit behind the times CD-ROM wise—the fastest available drives as this article was written were quad-speed, with three units still sporting now-obsolete double-speed drives. The feeble speakers built into these systems make even the cheesy units bundled with many multimedia systems sound powerful.

Still, there are times when a game notebook makes sense. If you already have a desktop PC and you need a laptop, buying a fast CD-ROM-equipped portable beams you into the world of multiplayer gaming. Just connect your laptop to your desktop PC using a null-modem cable or network card and you're all set up for head-to-head play.

If you're looking to replace an anemic 386 or 486 desktop PC, you can use your current keyboard, mouse, and monitor with a new portable system when you're at home, and just unhook everything when you hit the road. This capability is particularly convenient if you occasionally get together with friends for a round of network gaming. If you can handle the hefty price, chances are you can find a portable PC that's more powerful than the desktop unit you're using now. Next time you're on a plane flight, you'll be able to blast mutants with your BFG while the other passengers watch the edited version of *My Girl 2*. Which sounds like more fun?

Screen Play

One of the biggest decisions in choosing a notebook is whether to go for a dual-scan passive matrix display, or cough up an additional $500 or more for a TFT active-matrix screen. Today's dual-scan screens are much richer and sharper than first-generation passive-matrix LCDs, but they may not be suitable for some games. They have a slow refresh rate, and games which update the screen rapidly can seem jumpy. Fast-moving objects may leave a ghostly trail as they cross the screen. These effects are more evident in simulations and action games than in full-motion video products.

Active-matrix screens, on the other hand, work hard to justify their extra cost. Colors are more vivid and contrast is much crisper than their dual-scan counterparts, and active-matrix displays refresh quickly with no jerkiness or ghosting. If you're going to be playing primarily fast-action games on your laptop screen, you should seriously consider an active-matrix display. If you generally use an external monitor when you're gaming at home, you can save a good chunk of cash by going with a dual-scan model.

While conventional monitors can vary the size of pixels, allowing the typical 15-inch monitor to display full-screen resolutions from 320x200 all the way up to 1024x768, LCD screens have pixels which are fixed in size and position. With 640x480-resolution screens, this effect isn't usually noticeable. When you run a DOS game in standard 320x200 VGA resolution on such a unit, each pixel is doubled in size, leaving small 40-pixel gaps at the top and bottom of the screen. This gives a subtle letterbox effect.

Three of the laptops we reviewed had 800x600 pixel displays. These screens should be fine for properly written Win 95 games, but DOS games that run in 320x200 or 640x480 mode (and Win 95 games stuck at a fixed resolution) will only fill about 80 percent of the screen.

CANON

INNOVA BOOK 350CD

Canon's sporty little Innova Book 350CD weighed in with the lowest street price (about $2,400 with 8 MB of RAM) and the lightest weight (7.2 pounds with battery, power pack, and CD-ROM), but it also uses the most anemic processor.



Canon Innova Book 350CD

Canon uses a 100-MHz Cyrix 5x86 processor in the 350C. This Pentium-workalike can perform about as well as 75-MHz Pentium chip, but only when equipped with an external Level 2 processor cache to compensate for its slow 33-MHz motherboard speed. (Pentium chips run the motherboard at 50, 60, or 66 MHz.) Canon left out the L2 cache to keep the unit's price down, so the 350CD doesn't perform much better than a 486 DX4/100 system.

It's a shame Canon skimped in the processor department, because the other subsystems in the unit are top-notch. The unit posted the fastest DOS video scores of any unit tested, and it beat all but the 120-MHz Pentium system in Windows video tests. The unit was the only one in our roundup with actual SoundBlaster 16 circuitry handling sound output, and its quad-speed CD-ROM was one of the fastest of the pack.

While the 350CD excels in multimedia functionality, its case design is somewhat flawed. The single speaker sits under the wrist rest, and is partially obscured when your hands are on the keyboard. The critical problem, though, is the placement of the 350CD's touch-pad pointing device. While all the other touchpad-equipped notebooks position the pad somewhat to the left side of the notebook, Canon's designers dropped it into the dead-center of the wrist-rest area. As we typed on the unit, we constantly found ourselves accidentally touching the pad when our right thumbs dropped to the wrist-rest area, which in turn would move the cursor to a random spot in the document.

Although the 350CD uses an NiMH battery, it still managed to post the best time on our battery tests. The unit stayed up a full two hours and ten minutes with power-management turned off, running a benchmark that was heavily exercising the processor, video display, and hard-disk. You can expect over three hours of battery life for mundane activities such as word-processing.

The 350CD is available only with a 10.4-inch, 640x480-pixel, dual-scan screen—one of the sharpest dual-scan displays we've seen. There's a connector for a docking station, but so far Canon hasn't marketed one. Along with Win 95, Canon bundles SIDEKICK FOR WINDOWS 95, the OAG FLIGHT DISK, CITY STREETS, FAX WORKS 3.0G, an online user's guide, and a variety of online service access programs.

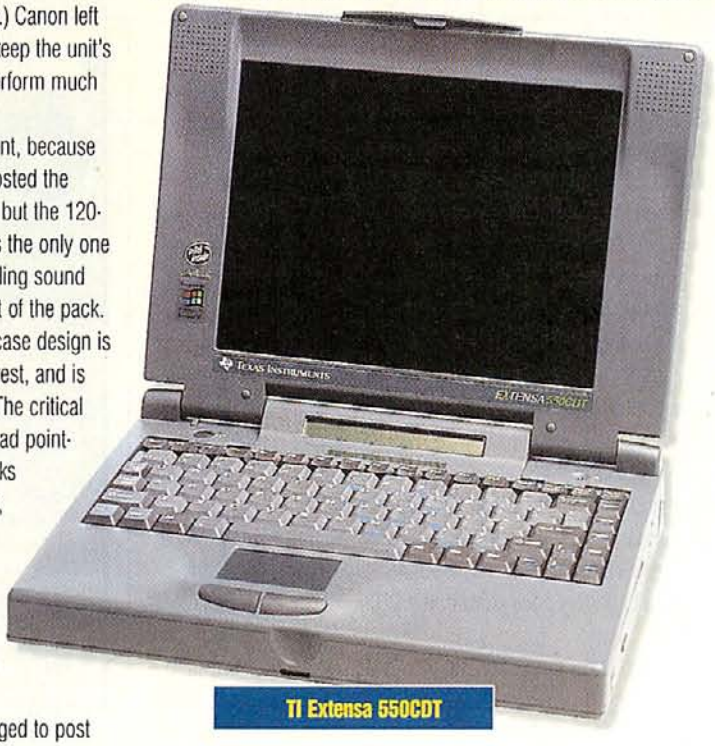
We found the 350CD a fine unit for playing games which don't require massive amounts of processor power, such as PANZER GENERAL, CIVNET, and FIGHTER DUEL. Its slower 5x86 processor and passive-matrix screen couldn't keep up, however, with the likes of EF2000 and INDYCAR 2. If you're on a tight budget, you need as light a notebook as possible, and your gaming habits tend towards adventure and turn-based strategy games, the Canon 350CD may be a good choice. But if it's power you seek, you're better off with one of the true Pentium systems.

Innova Book 350CD. *Estimated Street Price: $2,400. Canon USA, 800-848-4123, http://www.usa.canon.com.*

TEXAS INSTRUMENTS

EXTENSA 550CDT

The Extensa 550CDT is the flagship of TI's value-line series. (The company's most powerful notebooks are in the TravelMate 5000 series, but these aren't equipped with internal CD-ROM drives.) Despite its value-line designation, the Extensa 550CDT is no performance slouch.



TI Extensa 550CDT

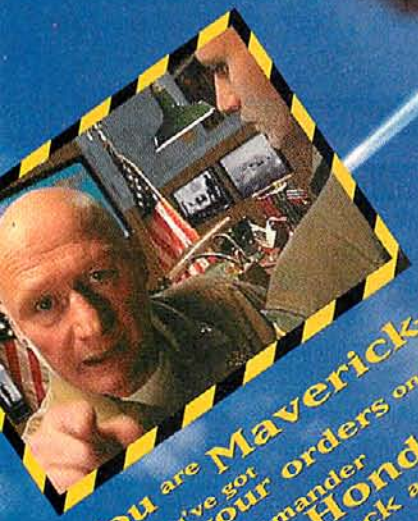
Equipped with a 75-MHz Pentium processor, 256K L2 cache, PCI local-bus video, and 16-bit sound, this value-line unit offers snappy, if not blazing, performance.

Sound is provided with the help of an ESS688 sound chip on the

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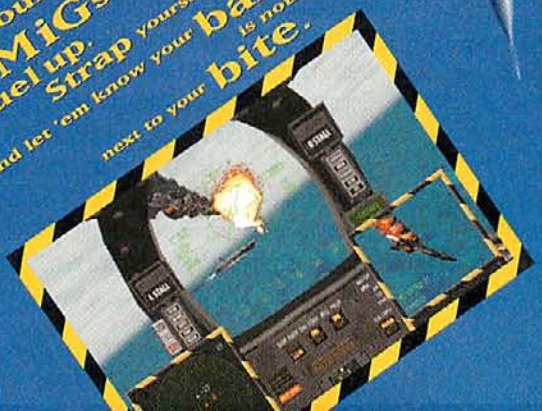
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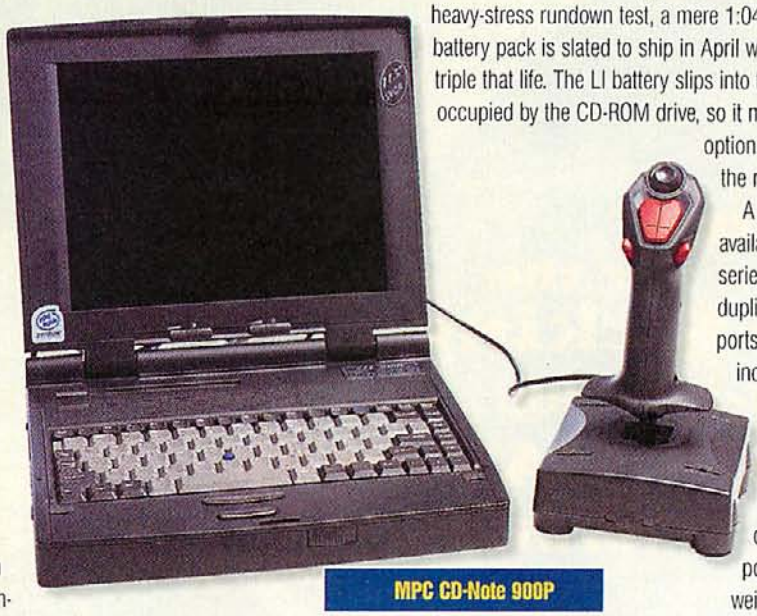
Spectrum HoloByte

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notebook's motherboard. Under DOS this chip emulates an 8-bit SoundBlaster Pro, but it provides true 16-bit sound for Windows applications. SoundBlaster compatibility was flawless in all three notebooks that used ESS chips. Dual speakers above the LCD screen provide decent stereo sound.

The single expansion bay can hold the included floppy or CD-ROM drives, or an optional LI battery. The 550CDT we tested included a poky double-speed CD-ROM drive and a 520MB hard disk, but by the time you read this the unit should be replaced by the new Extensa 560CDT. This unit is nearly identical to the 550CDT, but it substitutes a 1.2 GB hard drive and a quad-speed CD-ROM drive.

The 550CDT's touchpad is well-positioned on the wrist-rest, but the buttons are somewhat stiff, making double-clicking a bit difficult. You can also double-click by tapping the touchpad, so this may not be a big issue. This model sports an extremely sharp 10.4-inch, 640x480 pixel, active-matrix screen; a dual-scan screen is available on the 550CD/560CD units. If you're going to be doing most of your gaming on an external monitor, you may find the dual-scan unit's retail price—nearly $800 less than the active matrix—quite attractive.



MPC CD-Note 900P

The unit's NiMH battery posted the shortest life on our heavy-stress rundown test, a mere 1:04. An optional LI battery pack is slated to ship in April which should nearly triple that life. The LI battery slips into the bay normally occupied by the CD-ROM drive, so it may not be an option when gaming on the road.

A port replicator is available for the 550/560 series, but it simply duplicates the built-in ports and doesn't include a joystick port.

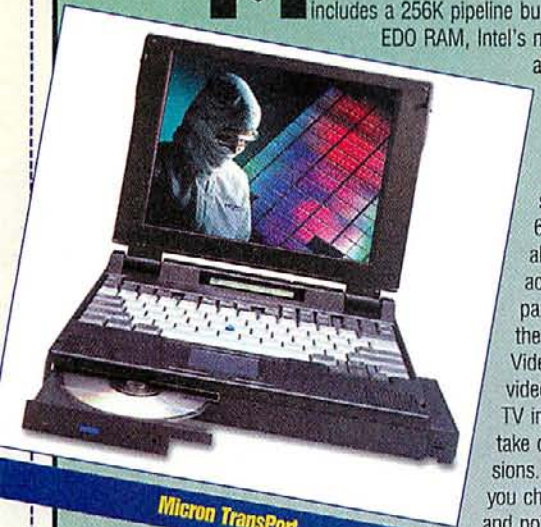
The basic unit was the second-heaviest of the bunch. While TI claims it weighs 6.4 pounds, it actually weighs in for travel at 8.4 pounds with the CD-ROM, battery, and external charger.

A good, but not exemplary, performer, the Extensa 550/560 series is worth a look if faster systems are out of your price range.

Extensa 550CDT. *Estimated Street Price: $3,725(560CDT), $2,750 (560CD). Texas Instruments, 800-848-3927, http://www.ti.com.*

In The Works

Micron's new Millenia TransPort has the potential to steal the "Dream Machine" title. Available with 120- and 133-MHz Pentium processors, the TransPort includes a 256K pipeline burst L2 cache, 16MB of EDO RAM, Intel's new Mobile Triton chipset, a built-in SoundBlaster 16 with dual stereo speakers, and a quad-speed CD-ROM drive. The 11.3-inch, 800x600 pixel screen displays up to 65,535 colors and is available in dual-scan and active-matrix models. A particularly cool feature is the inclusion of NTSC and S-Video output—just run a video cable to the big-screen TV in the den and gaming will take on much larger dimensions. Micron doesn't make you choose between a touchpad and pointing stick—both devices are built-in. At press time, the 120-MHz version of this 6.9 pound marvel was slated to ship at the end of March, with 133-MHz units following in early April. Prices start at $3,999 for a base model with a 120-MHz Pentium, dual-scan screen, 16MB of RAM, and an 810MB hard drive.



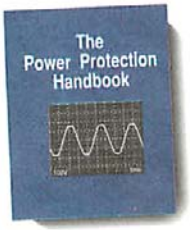
Micron TransPort

MPC

CD-NOTE 900P

Although MPC isn't as well-known as the likes of Canon, TI, Toshiba, and Gateway, we included the company's CD-Note 900P in our testing to get a feel for how the lower-priced, "generic" notebooks perform. The system is manufactured by Taiwan's Dual Technologies, and you'll find nearly identical units being sold by ARM, Chem, FutureTech, and other companies.

At first glance, MPC's CD-Note units look like incredible bargains: at press-time, a 133-MHz unit with 16 MB of RAM and an active-matrix screen sold for only $3,799. Unfortunately, some deals are too good to be true. Despite the presence of 256K of L2 cache, the 90-MHz unit we tested was dramatically slower than Toshiba's 90-MHz 410CDT; in fact, it was bested in most tests by the 75-MHz TI Extensa 550CDT. A more serious problem was the unit's inability to run some games, likely attributable to its use of the Gallant sound system instead of ESS or SoundBlaster chipsets. Although we had no problems running Windows applications on the system, we had plenty of trouble trying to get games to run from MS-DOS mode. FLIGHT UNLIMITED wouldn't run with sound active, and WING COMMANDER 3 wouldn't run at all. (WC3 also had problems in the graphics test module.) If you're running Windows games, or games that will run in a Win95 MS-DOS box, you may be okay, but otherwise you'll probably want to look at one of the other units

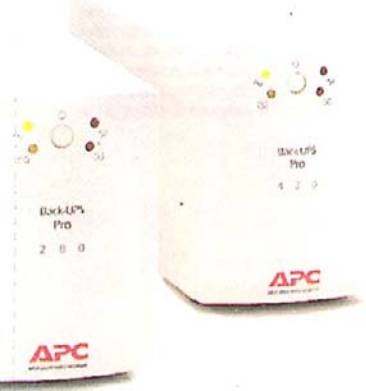


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Control Freaks

We searched far and wide for a PC Card (PCMCIA) adapter that would allow us to connect joysticks to multimedia laptop systems. We finally turned one up—in the United Kingdom. The GameCard II is a Type 2 PC Card that supports two joystick channels and includes both MS-DOS and Win95 drivers. Our testing showed the card to be compatible with all the hardware and software we tried, including Windows and DOS programs, as well as basic joysticks and more complex ThrustMaster and CH controllers.

JC Design is still seeking a U.S. distributor, so you may have to send your order across The Pond to obtain one of these handy devices. For ordering and price information, email reg@jcdesign.demon.co.uk, call 011-44-01371-874478, fax 011-44-01371-874300, or write JC Design Ltd., Rood End House, 6 Stortford Road, Great Dunmow, Essex, CM6 1DA, England.



JC Design GameCard II

for your gaming needs. This is really a shame, as the CD-Note 900P is the only unit we tested that includes a built-in joystick port.

The unit's physical design clearly indicates some of the cost saving in its construction. It weighs in at a very hefty 9.1-pound travel weight with one battery, the CD-ROM drive, and the power brick. In a really strange move, the designers placed the dual speakers on the bottom of the unit, pointing down at your lap. Although that placement may add a strange new feeling of enjoyment to some games, it's not very acoustically pleasing.

We did like the use of an IBM Trackpoint-style pointing stick instead of a touchpad, as well as the option to use the floppy and CD-ROM drives simultaneously when running of AC power. You can also run dual NiMH batteries in place of both the CD-ROM and floppy drives, more than doubling the 1:12 battery rundown time to 2:45. An optional docking station includes three expansion slots, two drive bays, and a full set of ports.

The CD-Note is available in a plethora of configurations, using 75, 90, 100, 120, or 133-MHz Pentium processors and either an 11.3-inch dual-scan or 10.2-inch TFT active-matrix screen; both screens support 800x600 resolution. The dual-scan display tested exhibited disconcerting color intensity variations between the top and bottom halves of the screen.

With bargain prices, built-in joystick ports, and numerous configuration options, we wish we could recommend the CD-Note series for gamers. Due to the compatibility problems with DOS games and the less-than-average performance in our benchmark tests, though, only those on a very tight budget who'll be living exclusively in Win95 need apply.

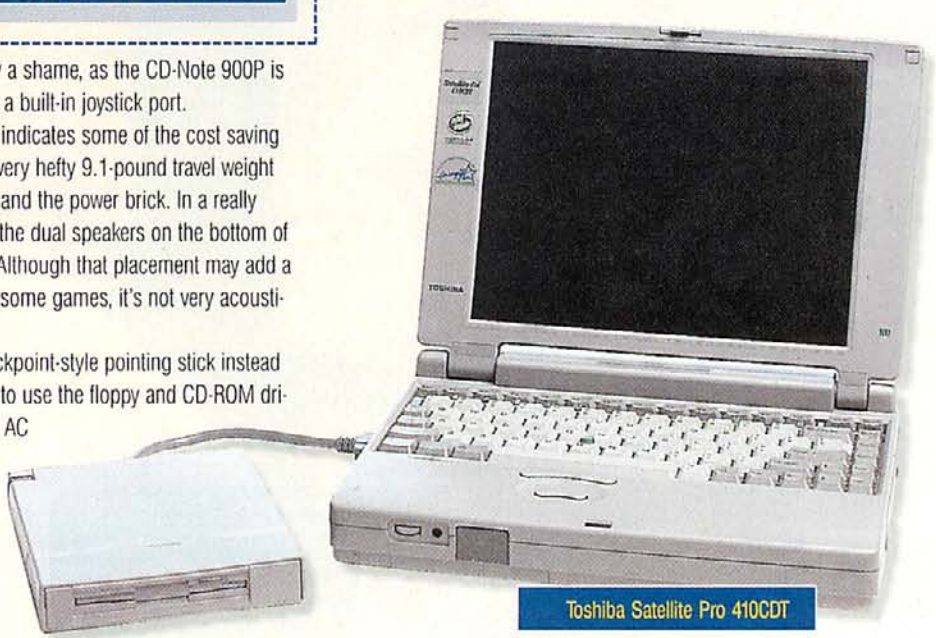
CD-NOTE 900P. *Direct Price: $2775. MPC Technologies, 800-672-8088, email help@mpctech.com.*

TOSHIBA

SATELLITE PRO 410CDT

Toshiba knows how to build notebooks. The Satellite Pro 410CDT was by far the most solid, well-designed, feature-packed notebook in our roundup, and easily wins the distinction of top choice for notebook gaming. This 90-MHz Pentium system lacks an L2 cache, yet still manages top-notch performance thanks to a fast EDO memory system and tightly integrated motherboard design.

The 410CDT's ESS688 sound chip and quad-speed CD-ROM drive provide top-notch multimedia performance, but, despite stereo sound support, the unit sports only a single, front-mounted speaker. An included adapter allows you to connect the unit's floppy drive externally at the same time that the CD-ROM is installed internally; you can also mount the floppy in place of the CD-ROM drive. (The Toshiba was the only unit that allowed us to swap the CD and floppy without rebooting. Just put the notebook into suspend mode, swap the drives, then turn it back on and pick up where you left off.)



Toshiba Satellite Pro 410CDT

The 11.3-inch active-matrix screen supports a resolution of 800x600 pixels; with 16-bit color (65,535 colors) support, and is the only screen in this roundup that displays more than 256 colors. The Accupoint pointing stick provides very precise control, but its driver caused recoverable errors when running AOL software, the one blemish on an otherwise smooth system performance. A truly convenient feature is the unit's internal power supply—there's no brick to carry around, just a power cord. There's no joystick port on the unit, but Toshiba's port replicator for the 410CDT includes one.

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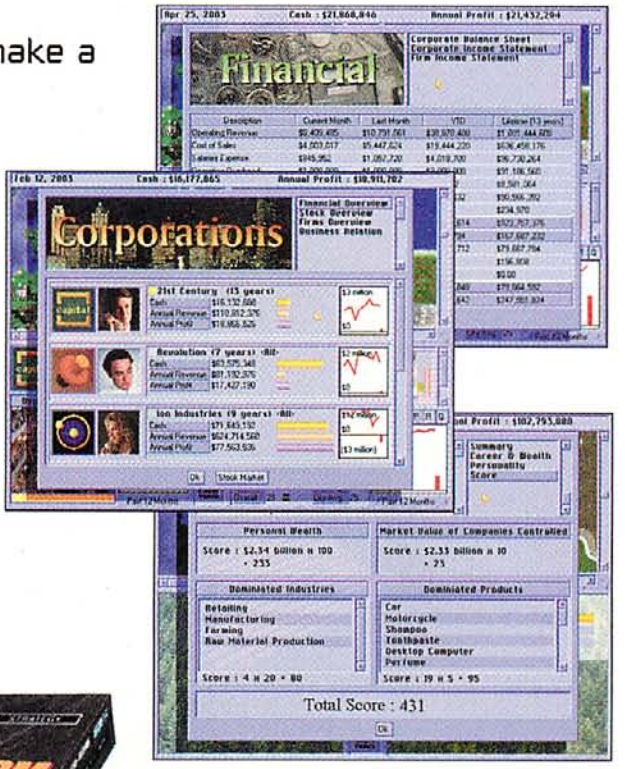
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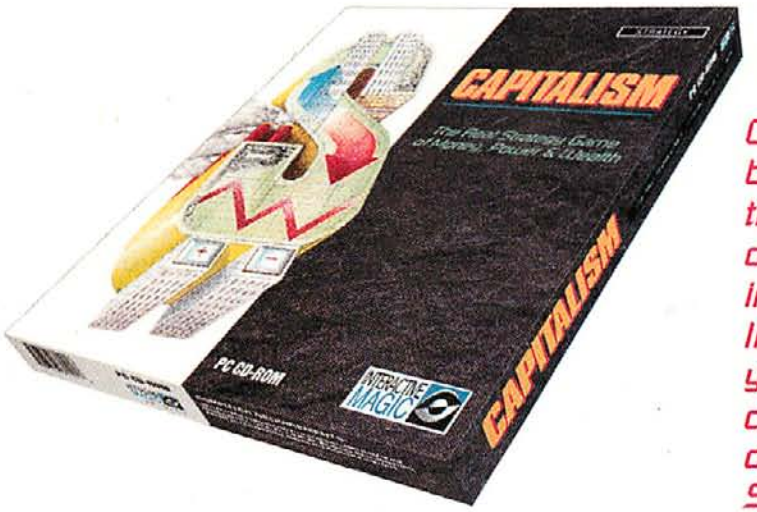
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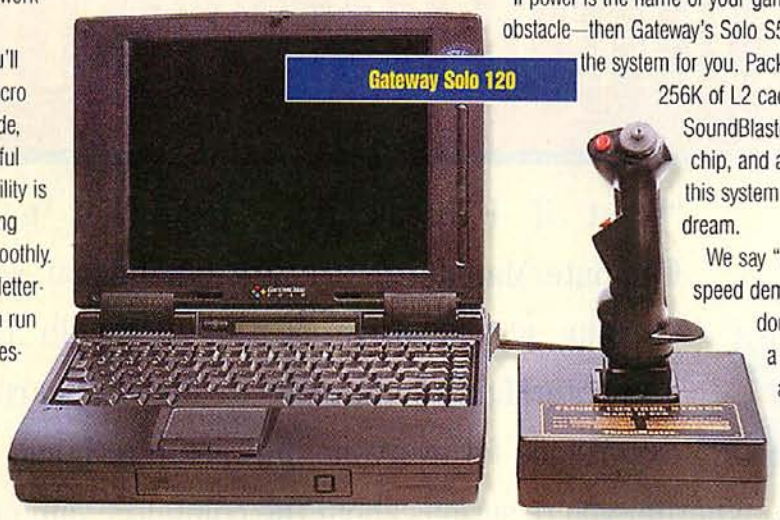
NOVA SPRING™

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The LI battery kept the unit running for 2:04 on our rundown test; using Toshiba's MaxTime power-management software we were able to use the unit for word-processing for more than four hours straight. One of the most convenient features of this notebook (shared with Gateway's Solo) is the ability to put the machine in an extremely low-power suspend mode instead of turning it off. This saves the time (and power-drain) of booting Win95 every time you use the system. You can simply put the notebook into suspend mode, then turn it back on days later and pick up your game or work right where you left off.

Along with MaxTime, you'll also find a function-key macro program, online user's guide, and a number of other useful utilities. Software compatibility is superb, and even demanding games like EF2000 ran smoothly. The only downside is the "letter-box" effect in games which run at 320x200 and 640x480 resolution, a problem shared by all the 800x600 laptops. If you're looking for a top-notch, nearly flawless portable game system, you can't go wrong with the Satellite Pro 410CDT.

Satellite Pro 410CDT. *Estimated Street Price: $4,200. Toshiba, 800-999-4273, http://www.toshiba.com.*



GATEWAY

SOLO S5-120XL

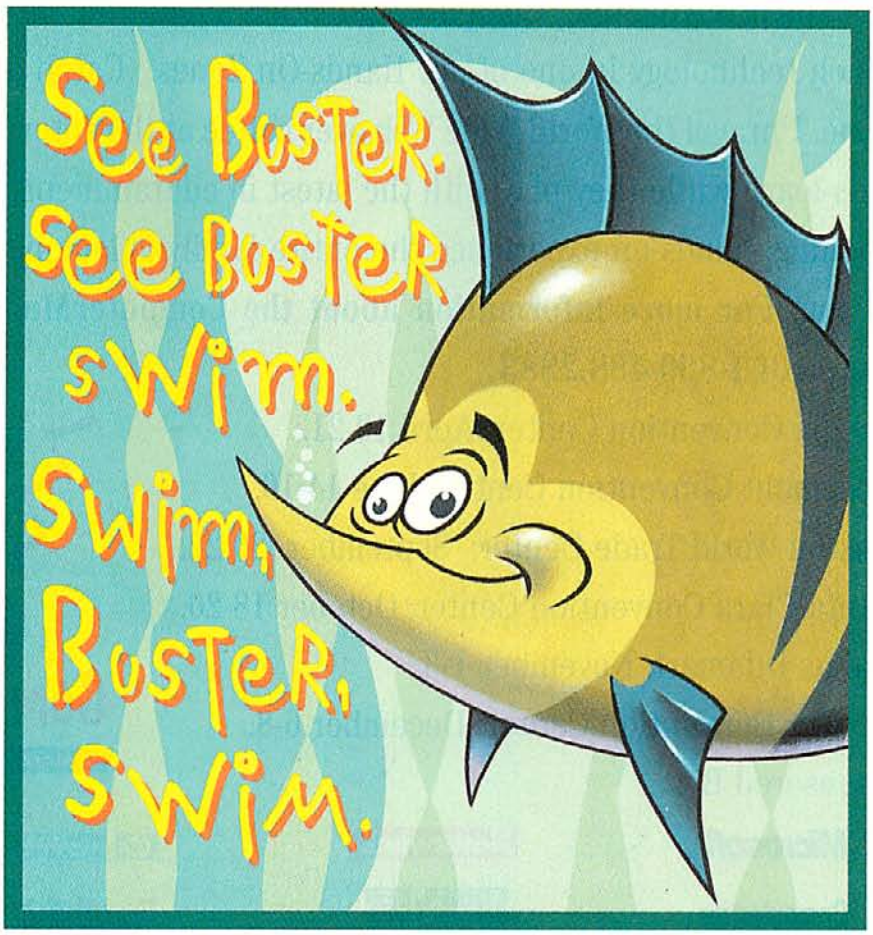
If power is the name of your game—and money's not an obstacle—then Gateway's Solo S5-120XL notebook may be the system for you. Packing a 120-MHz Pentium, 256K of L2 cache, ESS1688 SoundBlaster 16-compatible sound chip, and a massive 40 MB of RAM, this system is nearly a power user's dream.

We say "nearly" because this speed demon includes a sluggish double-speed CD-ROM drive, a curious anachronism in an otherwise state-of-the-art system. (Gateway says it plans to update the system to include a quad-speed drive in the near

Get To The Point

The trackball, it seems, is dead. The notebooks we tested exhibited a mix of pointing sticks and touchpads. The touchpad has been growing in popularity because it's very easy to learn to use. However, gamers may find it worth climbing the learning curve and getting used to the IBM Trackpoint-style pointing sticks. Touchpads are nearly useless in Doom-style games, and pointing sticks allow much more precision in games such as CivNet which require delicate cursor placement.

One particularly cool pointing stick enhancement was developed by *CG* publisher Jonathan Lane during the height of his Doom enthusiasm (or addiction, as the case may be). He carefully carved off the end of a pen cap so it would slip over the top of the pointing stick on his Toshiba notebook. Presto—instant built-in joystick. Lane warns, however, that you should be *extremely* careful not to close the laptop's case with the pen cap still installed, lest you drive a very expensive hole through your notebook's LCD display.



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future.) Also, the crisp 10.4-inch 800x600 active-matrix screen displays only 256 colors, placing it a notch below Toshiba's 11.3-inch, 16-bit color display.

The system's LI battery stayed active for 1:52 on our battery rundown test. A unique feature of the Solo's battery is a connector for the unit's AC power brick, which allows you to charge the battery even when it's not installed in the notebook, handy if you want to charge spare batteries while you're using the notebook. Like the Toshiba, the Solo offers a long-term suspend mode—instead of turning the notebook off and going through a tedious boot sequence when you restart it, you can leave the system in suspend mode for up to three weeks, then turn it back on and pick up right where you left off.

All this power doesn't come at the expense of portability. The unit's 7.3-pound travel weight was bested only slightly by the Canon 350CD. The compact case places its dual stereo speakers on the screen's hinges. An optional docking bar snaps onto the back of the machine and adds a joystick port in addition to duplicates of the unit's standard ports. The included floppy drive can only be swapped for the CD-ROM drive, but Gateway also

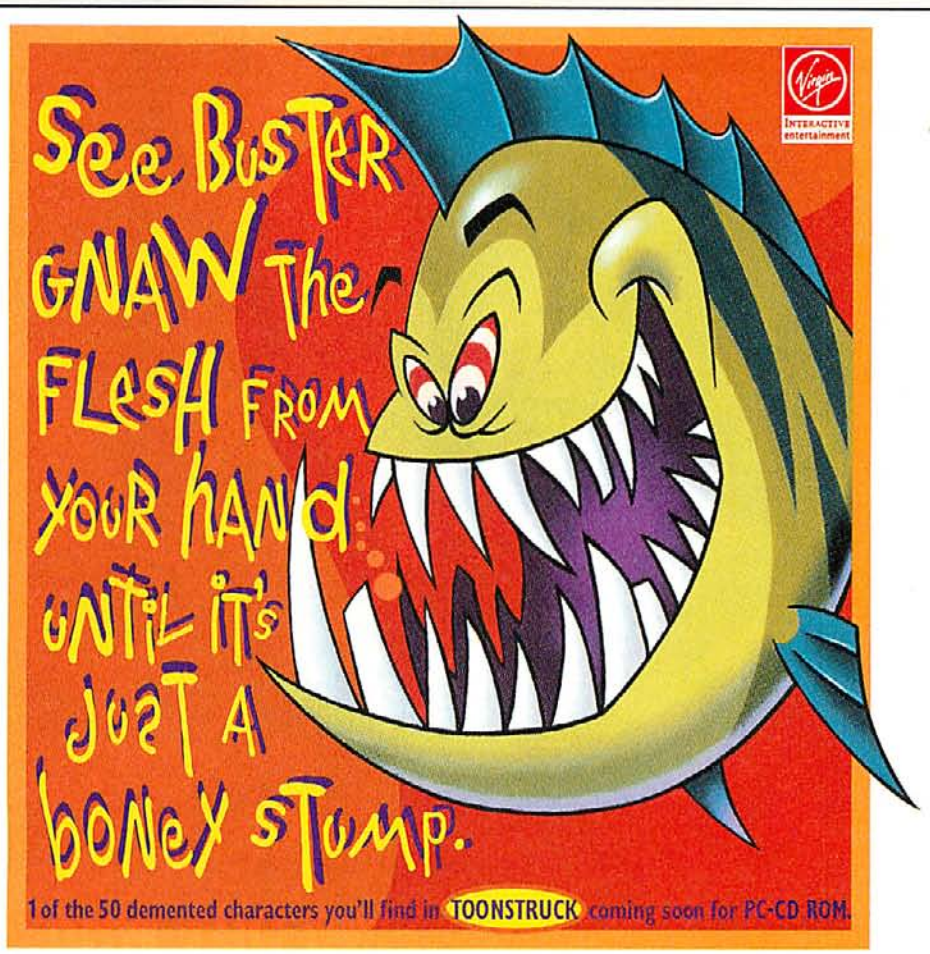
Specs and Features

	Canon Innova 350CD	TI Extensa 550CDT	MPC CD-NOTE 900P	Toshiba 410CDT	Gateway Solo120
CPU	Cyrix 5x86 100 MHz	Pentium 75 MHz	Pentium 90 MHz	Pentium 90 MHz	Pentium 120 MHz
Level 2 Cache	None	256K	256K	None	256K
RAM as tested	16MB	16MB	16MB	16MB EDO	40MB
Hard Disk	520MB	520MB	775MB	775MB	1.2GB
CD-ROM	Quad-speed	Double-speed	Double-speed	Quad-speed	Double-speed
Simultaneous CD/Floppy	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes (Optional external)
Graphics Chip	C&T 65530	Cirrus CL-GD7543	C&T 65545	C&T 65548	C&T 65545
LCD Type	Dual-Scan	Active	Dual-Scan	Active	Active
LCD Resolution	640x480	640x480	800x600	800x600	800x600
LCD color depth	256	256	256	65,535	256
Sound interface	SoundBlaster 16	ESS688	Gallant	ESS688	ESS1688
Battery type	NiMH	NiMH (LI Optional)	NiMH	Lithium Ion	Lithium Ion
Pointer	Pad	Pad	Stick	Stick	Pad
Joystick port	No	No	Yes	Yes (on docking station)	Yes (on docking station)
Speakers	1	2	2	1	2
System backup disks	Must create	Must create	Floppies	Must create	CD-ROM
Travel weight	7.2 lb	8.4 lb	9.1 lb	7.6 lb	7.3 lb
Street Price	$2,400 (8MB)	$3,725 (8MB)	$2775 (16MB)	$4,200 (8MB)	$5,699 (40MB)

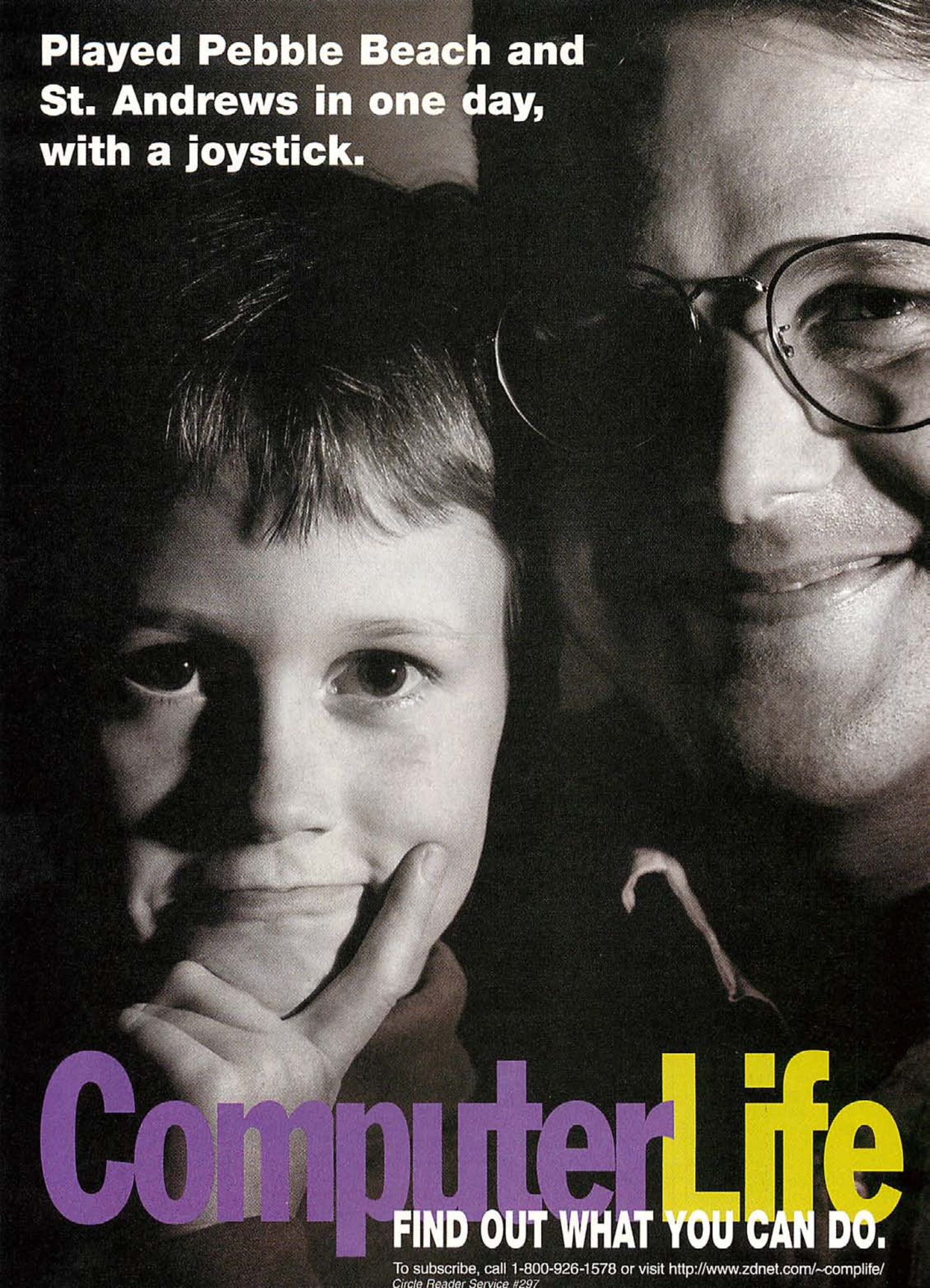
Seeing (Infra) Red

Infrared Data Association (IrDA) serial ports have quickly become almost ubiquitous on notebook computers. Of all the units mentioned in this article, only the MPC CD-Note 900P didn't sport one. These ports act like standard serial ports, transferring data at up to 115.2K bits per second. The difference, though, is that there's no cable required. They're designed for data transfer, but might they work for null-modem games?

We put them to the test, running CivNet, Fighter Duel, and Duke Nukem 3-D on the Canon Innova Book 350CD and the TI Extensa 550CDT. We simply told each game to set up a null-modem connection to the opponent's machine using the COM2 port. The games connected with no problem, but we initially had trouble with disconnects after a few minutes of play. Once we moved the notebooks a bit closer—within a foot or so of each other, across a table—the problems went away and we were able to complete games with no connection errors. Since IrDA connections require no extra equipment, you can now look forward to impromptu Duke Nukem 3-D deathmatches with other laptop-packing gamers in airport waiting lounges.



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sells an optional external unit which can be used simultaneously with the CD-ROM.

The S5-120XL package includes a number of extras, such as a 28.8K bps PC-Card modem, Microsoft Office 95 Professional, AutoMap, and a deluxe leather carrying case. If this system is too rich for your blood, Gateway also offers a 90-MHz version with 16 MB of RAM ($3999) and a 75-MHz, 8 MB version ($3299).

The Solo packs plenty of power for even the most demanding games. Once Gateway upgrades the slothful CD-ROM drive to a modern quad-speed unit, it should be a top choice for power-hungry gamers. Solo S5-120XL. *Direct Price: $5699. Gateway 2000, 800-846-4208, http://www.gw2k.com.*

Benchmarks Unleashed

To test the gaming performance of the notebooks examined here, we ran a collection of benchmarks based on the suite introduced in the January installment of our "Ultimate Game Machine" series. The WINBENCH 96 benchmarks tested system performance under Win 95, with scores reported for graphics, disk, CD-ROM, and processor subsystems. WINSTONE 96 runs a suite of popular productivity applications such as WORD, COREL DRAW, and LOTUS 1-2-3, and its scores indicate how each machine compares when you're forced to use the machines for productive purposes.

PC BENCH 9.0 was used to test each system's MS-DOS performance. 3D BENCH scores are included to give a comparative look at how each unit will perform when rendering 3-D graphics under MS-DOS.

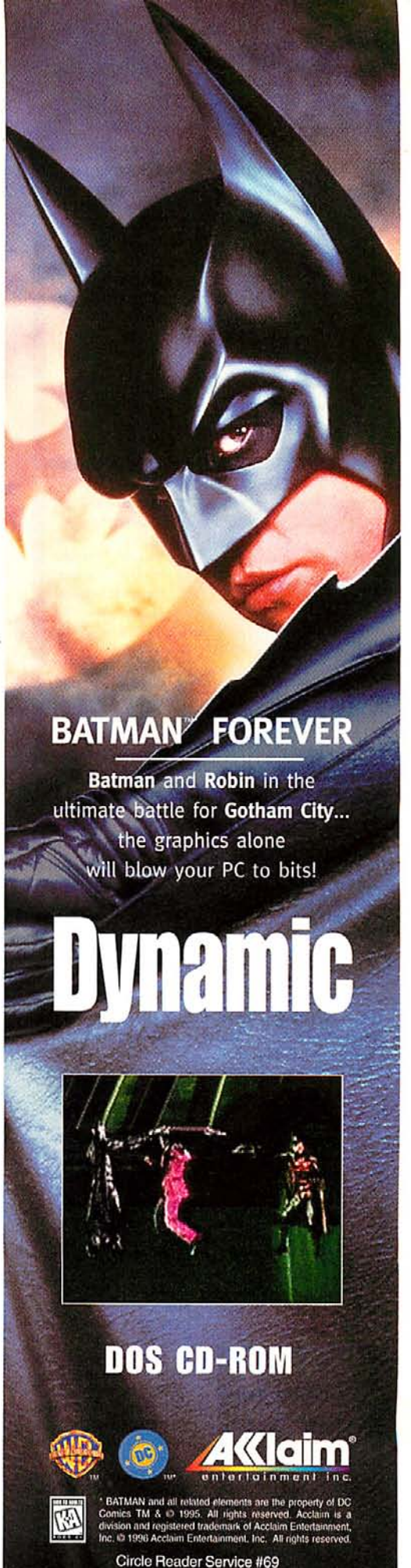
We ran VBETEST, included with the UNIVBE VESA driver package, to test each machine's compatibility with the VESA SuperVGA standards. Every unit failed the test, but this seems more indicative of peculiarities with how laptops handle various display resolutions than actual incompatibilities. Of the notebooks tested, only one had any problems running any of the VESA-compliant game software we threw at them.

To test graphics and sound compatibility, we ran Looking Glass Technologies' FLIGHT UNLIMITED. Finally, Origin's WING COMMANDER 3 was used as a further compatibility test, and to benchmark each system's real-world performance when loading CD-ROM-based entertainment software.

Battery rundown tests were conducted by disabling power management features (to ensure maximum system performance) and running a series of benchmark tests that heavily exercised each system's processor, hard disk, and display subsystems. Note that the times listed here are absolute worst-case scenarios, and you'll be able to get much longer use from the machine under most circumstances.

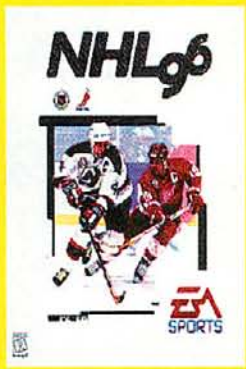
Ultimate Portable Game Machine: Benchmarks

Benchmark:	Test:	Canon Innova 350CD	TI Extensa 550CDT	MPC CD-NOTE 900P	Toshiba 410CDT	Gateway Solo120
Winbench 96	Graphics Winmark 96	8.15	3.79	3.54	5.93	10.3
Winbench 96	CD mix	417	195	227	425	240
Winbench 96	Disk Winmark	486	508	473	461	608
Winbench 96	CPU 16	108	125	125	163	201
Winbench 96	CPU 32	105	122	118	162	193
Winstone 96	Overall score	32.8	31.3	25.1	39.1	44.5
PC Bench 9.0	DOSmark	304.52	385.92	328.11	324.44	377.72
PC Bench 9.0	CPU 16	98.27	145.45	153.27	175.51	238.03
PC Bench 9.0	Video mix (graphics)	6897.47	5121.82	5498.99	6814.27	4392.59
3DBench	3DBench	55.5	43.4	47.6	58.8	50
VESA Compatible?	VBE Test	Failed	Failed	Failed	Failed	Failed
VESA Compatible?	Ran Flight Unlimited	Yes	Yes	Yes (sound problems)	Yes	Yes
WC 3	WC Load Time	20	36	wouldn't load	20	32
WC 3	Mission Load	24	36	wouldn't load	27	47
WC 3	CD Benchmark	612,734	309,054	309,054	623,579	306,367
Battery Rundown	APM Off	2:10	1:04	1:12 (2:45, 2 batteries)	2:04	1:52

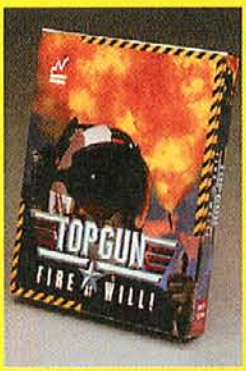


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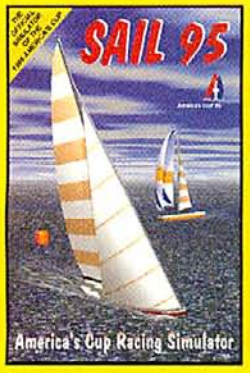
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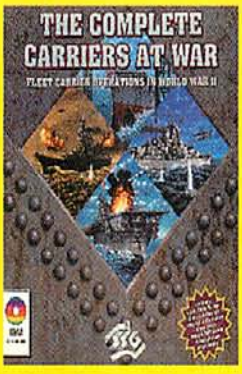
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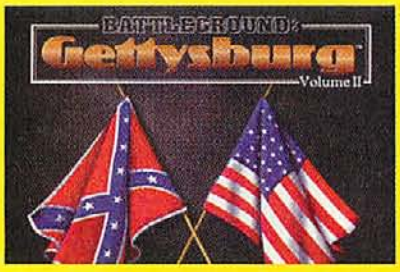
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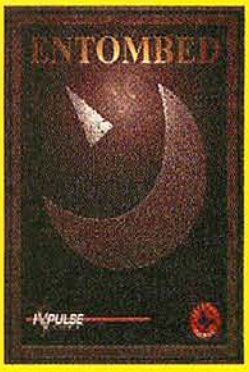
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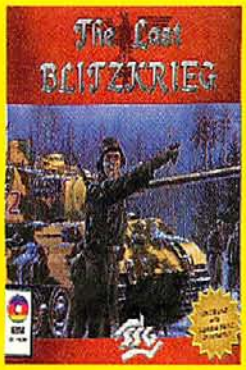
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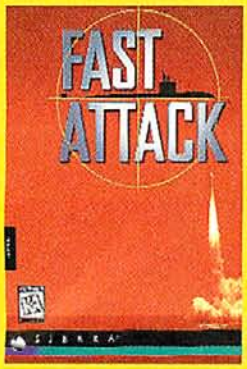
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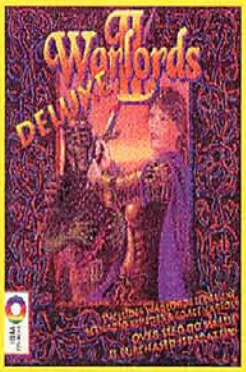
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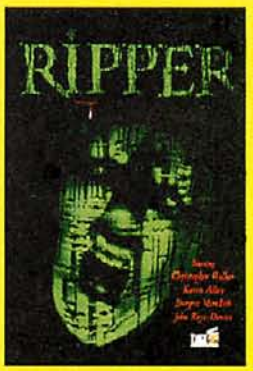
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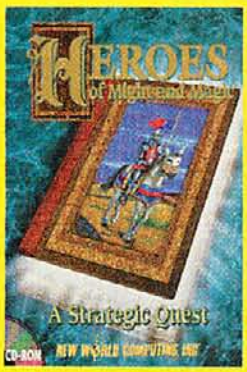
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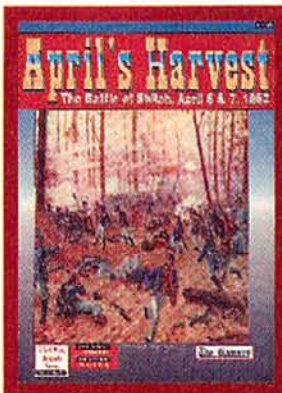
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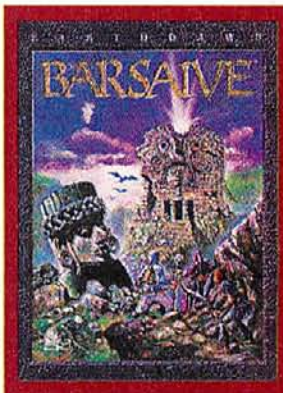
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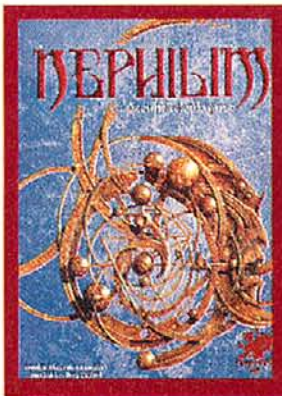
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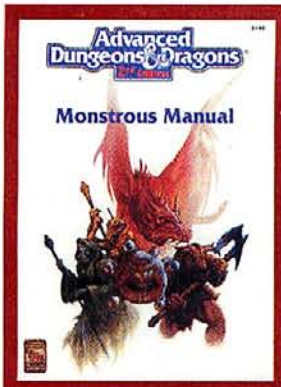
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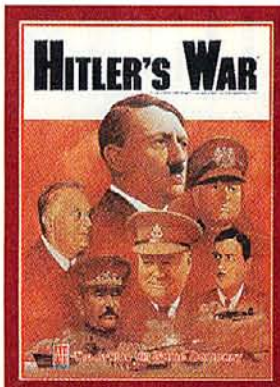
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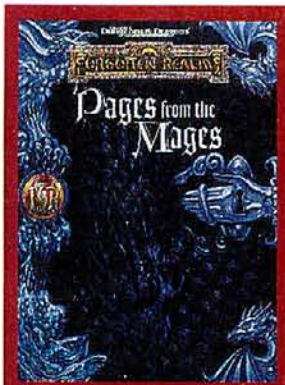
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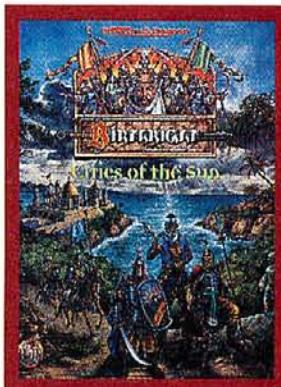
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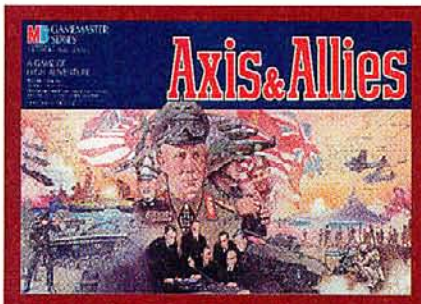
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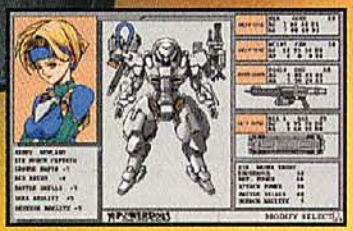
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Gaming Under Windows 95

Is Windows 95 A Killer Game Platform Or Isn't It?



DOS is dead, or so says Microsoft. To find out, I've been playing some of the first native Windows 95 games like MECHWARRIOR 2 from Activision and Mindscape's WARHAMMER: SHADOW OF THE HORNED RAT. I've also been following the discussion of these games on CompuServe and the Internet PC games newsgroups to see how gaming under Win 95 compares to gaming under DOS.

I want to share some of the things I've learned about Windows 95 game performance, but first, I think we need some historical perspective to understand the evolution of gaming on the PC. [Que tacky segue melody.]

In the beginning, there was MS-DOS, VGA and the IBM-PC architecture. Game programmers eager to exploit every drop of performance from the PC wrote to what was euphemistically referred to as the "bare metal." In other words, part of the job of programming a game meant the programmer had to understand the internal functions of the PC hardware, including graphics cards, sound cards and the PC itself. Some early games (FALCON 3.0 comes to mind) were written entirely in assembly language. Assembly language is simply a text representation of the actual hardware instructions. Writing code in assembly language often meant faster performance, but it's notoriously difficult to write and debug.

Meanwhile, Microsoft was busy shipping various versions of Windows: Windows 1.0, Windows 2.0, Windows 386, Windows 3.0... But Windows was almost universally ignored by game developers for several reasons: First, it was much more complex to write Windows applications. Second, and more importantly, since Windows shielded the programmer from having to understand many of the underlying hardware details, it also proved to be a serious performance drain that simulation and action game designers couldn't afford. So most games continued to be DOS-based.

When Microsoft announced that Windows 95 would do away with DOS as a separate operating system—although much of what was DOS underlies Windows 95—there was a wailing and gnashing of teeth in the game developer community. Some of the folks in the multimedia group at Microsoft took note of this and decided that Windows 95 should become the next great game platform.

LAB NOTES

▸ The mass storage world is heating up once again. Seagate and Quantum will be upping the disk-storage ante with 2-plus gigabyte EIDE hard disks, which have rotational speeds of 5,400 RPM. Iomega is shipping versions of its Jaz removable hard disks to PC manufacturer Micron, which is including the 1 GB removable drive in its high-end systems. Expect to see an external, SCSI version of the Jaz by the time you read this.

FIRST FORAYS

The first thing they did, almost as an experiment, was develop a set of graphics routines that ran under Windows 3.1 called WinG, but it only proved to be fast with certain types of graphics, and did nothing to address issues such as controllers (e.g., joysticks), sound cards (and MIDI) and multi-user play. In addition, WinG still didn't handle all of the graphics calls that game designers needed. WinG did prove useful, however. If you compare the graphics performance of the Windows version of SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION with the more current CIVNET, you'll notice that CIVNET runs appreciably better, because it uses WinG instead of the native Windows graphics libraries.

Next came DCI, a very low-level application programming interface (API) used mostly for handling digital video streams. DCI was important for most graphics card vendors and mainstream multimedia developers, because it was a "universal" piece of middleware that allowed a video playback engine to take advantage of underlying video acceleration hardware on graphics boards. Digital video has since become a key component for some types of games.

Of course, it wasn't enough. So the multimedia mavens at Microsoft, some-

> **"When Microsoft announced the death of DOS, there was a great wailing and gnashing of teeth."**

thing of a maverick bunch within the company, began a skunkworks project that was later code-named the Manhattan Project. Out of the Manhattan Project came a set of APIs Microsoft calls DirectX.

DirectX's component APIs—DirectDraw (2-D graphics, digital video), DirectPlay (LAN-based and modem-based gaming), DirectSound (audio, MIDI), DirectInput (joysticks, controllers) and Direct3D (3-D graphics)—allow programmers to have much finer control of and faster access to the hardware than Windows 95 would otherwise allow. Microsoft is pushing very hard to have DirectX blessed by both game developers and hardware vendors, and seems to have been successful in wooing both camps.

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THE PAYOFF

One of the most visible performance issues in games is graphics (no pun intended). DirectDraw replaces WinG and DCI, as well as adding much more. With that, let's take a look at what DirectDraw gives you, the game player.

First, a well-written game using DirectDraw should (emphasis on "should"—more on this later) yield a Windows 95 game whose performance compares favorably with its DOS counterpart. Secondly, it allows game developers to focus more on the game and less on developing custom graphics routines. Third, it will reduce the frustration of configuration.

This last point is a big deal since configuring a complex DOS game can be a daunting task, even for the technically sophisticated. One friend, a software engineering manager, avoids games that require complex installation, which limits him to a few games. In the last year or so, installation programs have gotten much smarter, but getting a DOS game to work properly can still be a royal pain in the posterior.

Windows 95 games will make installation much easier. Since Windows 95 itself stores information on the system's configuration in the Registry, the game's installation routine need only query Windows 95 as to what's available, and configure the game accordingly.

Fourth, the game should be able to take advantage of any graphics accelerators' capabilities provided the board's drivers are DirectDraw-compliant.

This last point is really a key one. In the past two years, almost all graphics cards shipped are designed to accelerate graphics routines, particularly the ones Windows calls most. Very few DOS games took advantage of these features, because every graphics adapter would require a separate driver and set of code. With DirectDraw, games get any benefits from graphics acceleration automatically. Similarly, the other DirectX APIs give programmers low-level access to audio hardware, networks, modems, joysticks and other features.

THE ENVELOPE, PLEASE...

So how does it all play? The answer, like so many in life these days, is "it depends."

Let's take a closer look at MECHWARRIOR 2 for Windows 95. When I first installed it, I was impressed with how easily it went. Then I discovered that calibrating a joystick occurred from the Windows 95 control panel. This was a real eye-opener. While no big deal for a single game, imagine now being able to calibrate joysticks in every game the same way. No more puzzling over how that new flight sim handles calibration.

The game ran quite well on my P133 using the Matrox Millenium's latest set of drivers (version 2.2). On the other hand, Activision removed one of the graphics modes from the game. The DOS version can run at 320x200, 640x480 and 1024x768. The Windows 95 version is limited to 320x200 and 640x480. Still, the game performed very well, and I've been having a great time with it.

Curiously, gamers' reactions have been mixed. Some players with very similar configurations to mine reported very poor frame rates, while others with much slower rigs reported great performance. I noticed similar contradictory messages regarding WARHAMMER's graphics performance. I thought I'd experiment a bit by installing a completely different graphics card. With that single task, a long odyssey began—a search for performance. We'll continue it in next month's column.

CG TIPS!

When purchasing a new Pentium rig, be sure the motherboard has Intel's Socket 7 processor socket. Socket 7 will be pin-compatible with the upcoming 180- and 200-MHz Pentium chips, as well as the rumored Multimedia Pentium. So when you're ready for more MIPs, it will be too.

If you're having problems configuring the Ensoniq Soundscape's Sound Blaster emulation mode, here's what you should do:

First, make sure the Ensoniq DOS command SSINIT.EXE exists somewhere (probably in a directory called C:\ENSONIQ (or the appropriate drive letter). Next, make sure the following commands exist in your AUTOEXEC.BAT startup file:

SET BLASTER=A220 I5 D1
SET ENSONIQ=C:\ENSONIQ (or the appropriate directory)

These environment variables *must* be present for SSINIT to work properly. When you want to run a DOS game that doesn't directly support the Soundscape, you go to the ENSONIQ directory and type "SSINIT", or you can have this command in your AUTOEXEC.BAT file.

This technique also works with the plug-and-play version of the Soundscape, although you need to have the plug-and-play DOS driver loaded.

If you've been frustrated trying to get FIGHTER DUEL to work with the Matrox Millenium, you're not alone. However, the fix is quite simple. FIGHTER DUEL uses the driver version of UNIVBE 5.1 in order to support the widest variety of graphics chipsets in Super VGA. But UNIVBE 5.1 does NOT support the Matrox Millenium. All is not lost, however, as the Millenium already has VESA 2.0 built into it. All you need to do is go to the Fighter Duel directory (e.g., cd \fduel). Then delete the UNIVBE driver by typing: DEL UNIVBE.DRV, and FIGHTER DUEL will run properly.

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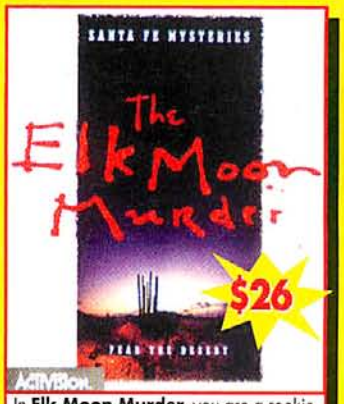
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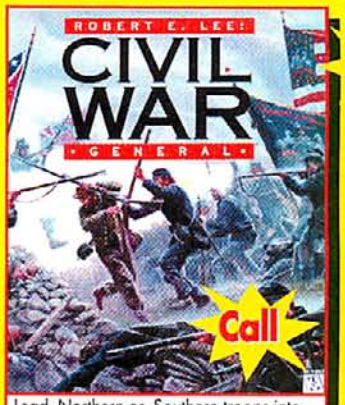
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CGW APRIL 96 DK DESIGN

Diary of a Game Designer

Discover The Challenge Of Game Design As It Happens!

by Alan Lenton

Alan Lenton is the Creative Director of Interactive Broadcasting, the United Kingdom's leading developer of multiplayer online games. Interactive Broadcasting is responsible for FEDERATION, *the extremely successful science-fiction game of trading and adventuring available on several systems (including AOL, GEnie and Delphi), and* ARMORED ASSAULT, *the lesser-known real-time science fiction tank/mining game currently in beta test (available on GEnie). Under Lenton's direction, the company is currently creating a massive World War II command simulation based on* OPERATION BARBAROSSA, *and* EXPLORER, *a game of Victorian-era discovery.*

Over the next year, this diary will follow the progress of EXPLORER *and explain how the team made game design decisions during development. We can't recall another series quite like this, and we hope you will be as fascinated by watching it come together as we have been watching games reach fruition over the years. —Ed.*

January: We (Interactive Broadcasting) have a new game to write for America Online. EXPLORER is set in the Victorian age, with parties of players undertaking expeditions sponsored by clubs and institutions. Now, I have to turn this bright idea into a real game that real people will be prepared to pay real dollars to play.

The general idea of the game was agreed upon with AOL, but naturally left a lot of design decisions still to be taken. My first consideration is determining what player parties are going to look like. The game is based on parties of players questing for objects like the mummified remains of Cleopatra's Asp. More than one party can be seeking the same object, sponsored by different institutions. As a result, parties are fundamental to the game, so we must get them right from the very start.

Traditionally, parties have a leader who tows everyone else around. We want to break the expeditions down into a series of sub-quests, some of which can be done simultaneously. This makes me wonder if the usual style of party is not too rigid. Also, with this style, ordinary party members become second-class citizens who basically get carried along without doing anything. Traditional parties are always in the same location—very constraining.

I think what we will do is define an expedition window in the user interface. All members of the party can communicate with one another—wherever they are—via this window. This means that the party can split into groups doing different things in different areas, but still be in touch and have the shared sense of being part of a coherent party.

This will solve the problem of the party being in more than one location. It also makes sure that all of the party members are involved in solving the problems posed by the quest. Unfortunately, it introduces a new problem—time. If some of the party go to London to get a letter of introduction to show the authorities in Cairo; some go to NYC to research the time of Cleopatra; while some stay in Boston getting equipment together, we could have something of a mess on our hands. We wind up with a bunch of people doing things at the same time in *real* time, but using wildly differing amounts of *game* time, and in supposedly different time zones. One thing is for sure, we can't have people just standing around waiting for their time to catch up with everyone else's!

I'm not sure exactly how we are going to handle this, maybe by having a time limit on each expedition. I will have to discuss it with the scenario writer, after he has gotten some idea about the size of the time mismatches. More next month!



JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY Over the next year, creative director Alan Lenton will explain the evolution of EXPLORER, an online game set in the Victorian era about parties of players questing for famous lost artifacts.

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(figure 1)

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(figure 2)

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Circle Reader Service #130

A New Bully On The Block

After Some Hiccups, Zephyr's P 166 Game System Roars

by Dave Salvator

Every once in a while, the whole can actually be *less* than the sum of its parts. Such was the case when we received Zephyr Computer Systems' new hotrod machine for gaming, the Onyx. On paper, this is one scary mother: a Pentium 166 MHz, 16 MB EDO RAM, 256 KB L2 burst cache, a Diamond Stealth64 Video 3240 graphics board, and a 1.6 GB EIDE hard-drive comprise its core sub-systems. All signs pointed to it being a true monster.

But despite these venerable components, the initial system we received didn't deliver as expected. There were problems with the BIOS and CD-ROM behavior, as well as a clumsy audio configuration. After some back and forth and system tweaks, Zephyr got all the pieces dialed in, and the machine began to cook.

The Onyx ships with Windows 95 preinstalled, DOOM, shareware versions of DESCENT, HERETIC and WARCRAFT, and several other apps and utilities. In addition to its heavy set of core hardware components, the Onyx also ships with a long list of high-quality peripherals: a 17-in. Nokia monitor, a SoundBlaster 16 with a Roland SoundCanvas daughterboard, a Sony SRS-D2K speaker system, a Teac 6X IDE CD-ROM drive, a US Robotics Sportster internal 33.6 Kbps modem, an Intel EtherExpress 10 Mbit/sec PCI network card, among others. Zephyr also includes a three-button mouse and a Wingman Extreme joystick, both from Logitech. One big customer-friendly advantage is that if you don't like or don't need a few components, they can be removed and credited to your purchase price.



PLUG & PLAY The Zephyr Onyx comes fully dressed for action, and it offers the fastest performance of any system we've tested.

Price: $4,080.
Zephyr Computer Corporation
Dallas TX
(800) 448-8806
email: ZEPHYR_COMPUTER_CORPORATION@msn.com
Reader Service#: 323

WORTH THE WAIT

After the tweaks came the good part—playing DOS titles—where this rig really delivered. DUKE NUKEM 3D, DESCENT II, FLIGHT UNLIMITED, and EF2000 all had very fast and smooth frame rates, thanks to Onyx's 166 MHz CPU and the Stealth64's S3 968 graphics chip. In DUKE NUKEM, the action sped along even in 800x600, and the game reported a constant 15 fps frame rate. The only downside to mention here is the Logitech Wingman Extreme joystick, which emulates a ThurstMaster FCS, but the Wingman lacks FCS' precision and subtlety.

In Windows 95, Diamond's drivers include the InControl tools that Diamond has implemented as shell extensions, which you can invoke by right mouse-clicking on the Desktop to change real and virtual screen pixel resolutions, color depth, and enable/disable your screen saver.

In WinBench tests, the reviews were, for the most part, impressive. The Onyx's CPUMark scores were very good as expected, but only about six percent faster than the Falcon Northwest Mach V rig we reviewed in January. Its Disk WinMark score was disappointing, however: about 23 percent slower than the Mach V. Diamond's Stealth64 turned in a very respectable Graphics WinMark score of 28 at 800x600x256 colors, probably the drivers' optimized color depth, but its score dropped about 43 percent when we stepped the color depth up to 16.7 million colors. 3D Bench numbers were equally impressive, coming in about 14 percent faster than the Falcon's. Onyx's CD-ROM WinMark score of 609 was about 11 percent faster than Falcon's.

Out of the gate, the Onyx disappointed us despite its very impressive array of hardware components. Onyx "V 1.1," on the other hand, was a screamer, especially for DOS games. Fortunately for you, the company claims that the system's new configuration will now be standard. In its newly-improved form, the Onyx is definitely worth considering if you're ready to pony up for blazing DOS game speed, and very good Windows 95 performance.

APPEAL: Gamers with deep pockets looking for screaming DOS performance, and fast Windows 95 performance.

PROS: Screaming performance in a machine designed for gamers, and a healthy list of first-rate components.

CONS: All those goodies don't come cheap; mediocre bundled joystick.

CG RATED

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REVIEW • NEC M500 MONITOR

Sight & Sound

New NEC Monitor Is Ready To Play

by Dave Salvator



Looking for a multiscan monitor that won't bust the bank? NEC's new 15-inch M500 may be just the ticket. The monitor's new ChromaClear technology combines traditional dot-trio and aperture-grille technologies with elliptical phosphors (rather than the traditional round or striped) to produce sharp, clear images. The EnergyStar-compliant M500 also has a pair of shielded speakers and a built-in microphone.

Installing the M500 is fairly simple, though NEC's documentation doesn't list steps for adding the M500's driver under Windows 95. The M500's built-in Onscreen Manager (OSM) allows you to tweak image alignment, geometry and color saturation. Other settings let you adjust speaker volume, treble, bass, balance, and four different audio modes, two of which use spatializing techniques to artificially "widen" the stereo field. OSM's controls are easy to navigate and use, and they allow minute adjustments.

The M500's image quality was very good under Windows 95, and its focus remained solid even at higher resolutions and smaller fonts. We looked at the screen's convergence at 800x600x16.7 million colors by displaying a grid of white lines on a black background, and saw almost no "leakage." Under DOS, DUKE NUKEM 3D's rendering looked sharp, and its colors accurate. The monitor's maximum vertical refresh rates are also impressive: 120 Hz at 640x480, 110 Hz at 800x600, and 86 Hz at 1024x768. Typically, if your vertical refresh rate is below about 72 Hz, screen flickering becomes noticeable and very annoying.

The M500's audio was less impressive, and gaming audio lacked any low-end punch, as did wave files and Audio-CD music. For basic no-frills audio, they're fine, but for chest-rattling explosions and convincing music, stick with your multimedia speakers.

Underwhelming speaker performance aside, the M500 brings a lot to the party for $599. Its clear, well-focused display will serve gamers and non-gamers alike. NEC is also planning a $899 17-in. model, the M700, slated for release in June.

Price: $599
Manufacturer: NEC Technologies
Wood Dale, IL
(800) NEC-INFO
www.nec.com
Reader Service #: 325

APPEAL: Gamers on a budget looking for a clean display.

PROS: Excellent sharpness and color, very good adjustment tools.

CONS: Mediocre audio from bundled speakers.

CG RATED

REVIEW • GRAVIS GRIP

CGW Gets A GrIP

CG CHOICE

Gravis Puts More Control In The Hands Of Action Gamers

by George Jones



Gravis' GrIP technology looks capable of changing the face of action gaming on the PC. The gamepad controllers look almost exactly like Sega's Saturn devices, with six main buttons and two top buttons. The plastic controllers are lightweight and comfortable, with buttons and a directional pad that feel right.

The sleek black stealth-bomber shaped Multiport is the central unit and consists of four 9-pin GrIP sockets and two "pass-through" 15-pin ports for good, old-fashioned joysticks (both types of controllers are *not* available at the same time). The GrIP Sports Pack comes with a Multiport, two GrIP controllers, and a copy of Electronic Arts' NHL HOCKEY '96. One bonus with the MultiPort is that you no longer have to bend over backwards to get at the darn game card whenever you want to switch joysticks.

Additional GrIP gamepads, frustratingly, were not available at press time (how are you supposed to play four-player NHL HOCKEY when the Sports Pack comes with only two gamepads?), but should be available by the time you read this. Gravis also promises real joysticks down the road.

Installation was a snap. Utilities allow you to reprogram the GrIP for DOS games running under Windows 95.

My only real problem was with the GrIP setup in NHL HOCKEY. It took me a couple of tries before I figured out how to reconfigure my gamepads (hint: hold down "A," then click on the appropriate numerical button). Once configured, the GrIP performed very well with four players in NHL HOCKEY and NBA '96.

There aren't many GrIP-capable titles out right now, but count on more developers to support it in the near future.

Price: $99.95; individual GrIP controllers available separately (Price TBA)
Advanced Gravis
Vancouver, BC, Canada
(604) 431-5020
http://www.gravis.com

APPEAL: Anyone tired of the PC's archaic two-button, two-joystick architecture.

PROS: Allows four 8-button controllers to be active at the same time.

CONS: Hard-to-understand manual, inability to use old and new controllers together.

CG RATED

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Circle Reader Service #247

Phone Frag

Voice & Data Modem Lets You Add Insult To Injury

by Dave Salvator



Eiger Labs is hoping you'll start a fight with a friend. And they've got just the thing to set you off. Their new Digital Simultaneous Voice and Data (DSVD) modem allows you to play point-to-point with another player on most of your favorite twitch games like DOOM II, DESCENT II, NASCAR RACING, and WARCRAFT II among others, with more on the way.

HeadOn's installation is fairly straightforward, though it's not a Plug-and-Play device, and uses the ever-vexing jumpers to set base I/O address and IRQ. Installation under Windows 95 requires that you manually add a driver for a generic 14.4 kbps modem, with which HeadOn's bundled software can interface.

According to the sparse documentation, a utility is supposed to step you through connecting with your opponent. We hit a glitch in our first attempts to connect where both players couldn't see the list of games to play, and as a result, we weren't able to get any games going. A new revision of the bundled Phylon software fixed the problem, and the units performed well. There was very little latency in DOOM II, though the voice signal had a perceived delay of about a half-second.

The HeadOn also ships with Windows-based PlayLink software that runs on Windows 3.11 and 95, and performs the same task as its DOS-based counterpart. It has some nice enhancements like a phone book for frequently-called numbers. PlayLink for Windows will work with any Windows-based title that supports a serial connection.

Currently, Eiger Labs doesn't have an expected date when the HeadOn will support DirectPlay—Microsoft's multiplayer gaming API—under Windows 95. An upgraded set of drivers supporting 28.8 kbps data connections should be available as you read this. Eiger's web site includes a listing of opponents looking for playmates.

Price: $159
System Requirements: IBM PC 386 or better, 3 MB of hard-drive space
Manufacturer: Eiger Labs, Inc.
Sunnyvale, CA
(408) 774-3456
www.eigerlabs.com
Reader Service # 326

APPEAL: Action gamers eager to "reach out and crush someone."

PROS: Bundled headset, very little latency.

CONS: Hardware is not P'n'P. DOS software lacks phone book, and has some rough edges.

CG RATED

This is the game...

...for which you have been waiting!

Announcing The Elder Scrolls: Daggerfall, Bethesda's latest installment in the Elder Scrolls Series and the sequel to the award-winning Arena.

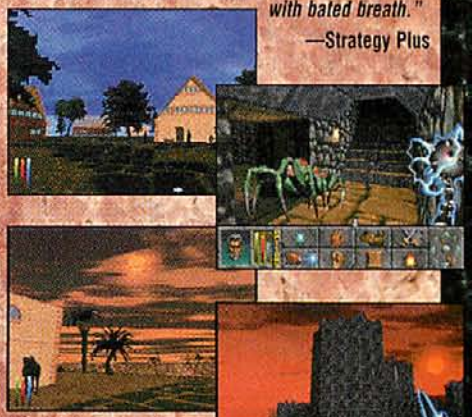
TES: Daggerfall is the most ambitious computer game ever devised. This is no dungeon hack, no bit of fluff with medieval trappings. Daggerfall's world is twice the size of Great Britain, filled with people, adventures, and scenery as real as reality. This is a world designed to allow you to play the game any way you want. Be the Hero or the Villain... or anything in between.

TES: Daggerfall is all your favorite movies and books wrapped up in one package. You will enjoy hundreds and hundreds of hours of playtime in your new obsession.



"This is the game that hardcore FRPG fans have been waiting for since the beginning ... Daggerfall will introduce players to a mirror land inside their computer that looks and feels like real-life..." —Trent Ward, PC Gamer

"Taken all together, the many excellencies of The Elder Scrolls: Daggerfall mean that Bethesda is going to be the company defining the future of CRPG-ing on computers for some time to come. Wait for this one with bated breath."
—Strategy Plus



Actual IBM screens shown

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Circle Reader Service #51

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Circle Reader Service #73

The Intelligent Soldier

Artificial Intelligence Takes On The Smoky Battlefield



Ask Gary Kasparov if there's a computer chess simulation that can beat him regularly, and he'll likely laugh in your face. But if you're an average chess player and take on a tough computer chess opponent, with the difficulty level set to maximum, you'll probably end up like me: a very sore loser, wondering just how the game's AI did that.

Chess has long been the game which has served as the benchmark for AI reasoning. After all, it's a classic game, full of subtlety and challenge, and it's one of mankind's most difficult games, right?

Let's consider the game a little more closely. The board is a homogenous checkerboard of eight by eight squares (64 in all). 32 pieces begin the game, but there are only six variations, and each of these possess very simple movement restrictions.

When the AI in your chess game begins to contemplate a move, it has the luxury of evaluating every possible move for each of its pieces, as well as the probable future ramifications of each move. These possibilities will most likely be mapped out in a min/max decision tree allowing the program to decide which move offers the maximum possible advantage. If you're playing the game at maximum difficulty, this AI reasoning for a single turn might take several minutes.

Now consider a game like STEEL PANTHERS. The board is 80 by 100 hexagons in dimension. Each hex isn't black or white, but can be road, desert, hill, brush, water, bombed or smooth, etc. Instead of only six unit types, there are dozens, each with unique abilities, completely flexible movement (with restrictions, of course), and each with a unique objective in mind. The units must also be concerned with other variables, such as morale (do pawns suffer a rout due to low morale when they encounter a queen?). The level of complexity is "millions of times more complex than in a chess game," says Gary Grigsby, designer of SSI's STEEL PANTHERS. "Just think about it."



WHO'S GOT THE BUTTON?: With 8,000 different hexagons, and dozens of variables for each one, the complexity of STEEL PANTHERS' AI engine makes a chess game look like tic-tac-toe.

STEELY PANTHERS

The AI routines in STEEL PANTHERS attempt to do three separate tasks: to pick an appropriate force for a battle, deploy that force intelligently and actually fight the battle.

When deploying the force, the AI routines actually do rely on quite a bit of randomness to offer the player a different-looking force each time a scenario is played. For example, an armored force might contain anywhere between one third and two thirds tanks. Each nationality also uses a different approach to design their own fighting force.

When fighting a battle, there is very little randomness. No matter what side or nationality, the game engine uses the same core AI, and the overriding mission is the quest to secure objective hexes. Occasionally, however, certain flags are used to indicate the way a given nationality might react in a certain situation.

The only portion of the battle AI which relies on randomness is when a computer-controlled force is on the defensive and has been driven back from an objective hex. In that situation, the AI might launch a counter-attack, but the timing of that attack is completely random.

"I don't want to have the AI thinking too much," confesses Grigsby. "Simply plotting the best path from one end of the board to the other for each unit would take minutes of computation time, even on a fast Pentium." He points out that a human's natural ability to conceive of complex spatial situations in a matter of

> **"A human's natural ability to quickly conceive of complex spatial situations is impossible for a computer to duplicate."**

seconds is impossible for a computer to duplicate.

ON THE BATTLEFIELD

In the heat of battle, what does the AI do? For an example let's consider a tank HQ unit, and what operations it works through during the course of a single turn. Initially, the unit determines if there is need for indirect (artillery or air-support) fire or smoke. This process first involves determining the most dangerous units and then ordering the proper indirect attack.

Next, the unit opens up direct fire on an appropriate target *before* the movement phase, since any movement greatly decreases the chance of a direct hit. Before actually firing, the unit will evaluate all possible targets and choose the best targets. It won't waste its time on a routed unit or a small infantry unit if there are "meatier" foes to be had.

"The computer does cheat," admits Grigsby, "and knows when a unit has used up all of its shots." If a unit has no more opportunity fire shots left, then it might not pose a great threat and will be passed over.

Finally, the unit advances, usually towards an objective hex, but the unit might choose to advance towards a particularly threatening enemy unit. If the unit is not an HQ unit, then before it moves it will check to see if it is more than five hexes away from its leader. If it is, then moving towards the HQ unit might take precedence over moving towards an objective. The problem arises when a tank might have advanced ahead of its HQ unit. Does the unit turn around and retreat, giving up hard-won ground? How do you resolve that conflict?

"You don't," says Grigsby. "It's not hard for a human to tell at a glance what to do, but telling the AI to figure out that situation without doing something stupid is very difficult."

The AI doesn't try to do fancy things like an end-run, because the complexity of coordinating attacks can cause the AI's integrity to break down.

"With an 80x100 grid," says Grigsby, "all sorts of weird things can start happening. With this AI, an end-run would be from mediocre to really embarrassing, and I don't want the AI to be hilariously bad."

TAKING ON THE GRAY MATTER

Is STEEL PANTHERS' AI a challenging opponent for an experienced player? Not really, says Grigsby. "The human who learns the system achieves almost a god-like status. An experienced human player playing against the AI will probably clobber it, but the player still isn't immune to threat. The AI's not a complete joke. In actuality, I could work for several more months on the AI, but it would only be a marginal improvement."

In STEEL PANTHERS, a chief human advantage is the ability to play a scenario and learn from it, grasping the battlefield situation and the immediate and long-term goals. Replaying the scenario with that added wisdom gives us the advantage of almost psychic clairvoyance into the impending combat situations, and our odds for victory (and our self-satisfying smirk) are greatly increased. Grigsby, however, is quick to caution: "Most commanders in a real life battle didn't get to do it twice."

A HOLIDAY IN GETTYSBURG

"I've never played an SSI game that I didn't beat on the first try," says Jim Rose, executive producer of BATTLEGROUND:GETTYSBURG. "That doesn't mean that I didn't like the game..."

Jim Rose and a bevy of other talented wargamers formerly from Avalon Hill have teamed together to form Talonsoft, which has brought us BATTLEGROUND: GETTYSBURG and BATTLEGROUND ARDENNES. GETTYSBURG lets gamers experience the entire three-day struggle as a single campaign or play a multitude of skirmishes that make up the battle.

Unlike 20th century warfare, the Civil War wasn't fought with technology — in fact, the majority of the technology was

The Code Of The Steel Panthers

The following is a portion of the main AI loop from STEEL PANTHERS, coded in C. In the first primary process section of this procedure, the computer player takes an inventory of the objective hexes controlled and determines if that value is less than the number that *should* be controlled. If it is, a counter attack might be necessary to retake the lost objectives. What follows is one of the only random actions taken by the battle AI (in a series of if and else if queries) as it decides what type, if any, of a counter offensive will be launched.

```
void AIPhase(u8_t cPlayer)
{
        i16_t i,f,fhu,h,hqu,mis,c,ct,lu,tgt,shot,maxMove=3,enemy,foot,afv,endgame,nat;
        i16_t tval,x,y,stopPass,oldShot;
        u16_t action,pass=0,trg,erg,mov,mineRg;
        bool_t moved;
        i16_t acc,weapon,targetPlayer;
        bool_t firstShot;
        i32_t           cChance,vic=0,total=0;

        MOUSE_set_pointer(gMouse,MOUSE_HOURGLASS);

        targetPlayer=1-cPlayer;
        gOnlyWeapon=0;

        // first decide if we need to counter attack
        for(i=0; i<21; i++)
        {
                //SCORE POINTS FOR EACH OBJECTIVE HEX CONTROLLED
                if(mem->sc.con[i]!=cPlayer)
                {
                        vic+=mem->sc.val[i];
                }
                total+=mem->sc.val[i];
        }

        if(total<1)
                total=1;

        cChance=100*vic/total;

        if(Random(100)<5 && cChance>50)
        {
                cChance=100;            // full counter attack
        }
        else if(cChance>=75 && cChance<90 && Random(100)<10)
        {
                cChance=100;            // everyone charge
        }
        else if(cChance>=90)
        {
                cChance=cChance/3;      // select units charge
        }
        else
        {
                cChance=0;  // don't even try
        }
}
```

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CHESS IS CHILD'S PLAY

"With an 80x100 grid, all sorts of weird things can start happening," says Gary Grigsby. The level of complexity is "millions of times more complex than in a chess game."

unreliable and abysmally inaccurate—but fought with the hearts and minds of leaders and the hearts and hides of the foot soldier. Gone are the rapidly fluctuating battlefields of STEEL PANTHERS. Instead, the terrain is littered with lines of weary soldiers, each fighting to stave off exhaustion as well as those on the other side of the Mason-Dixon line.

"In most computer wargames up until recently," says Rose, "players could just push their troops until they won or their troops died. GETTYSBURG utilizes battle fatigue as the cornerstone of the AI procedures (battle fatigue, not marching fatigue). In the Civil War, troops could only handle about a half day of fighting before they were [used up]."

Using fatigue as a bedrock AI issue, the designers crafted their AI to best match the performance and feel of a slowly churning Civil War battle. Fatigue creates exhausted troops, and a fatigued brigade is at a serious disadvantage in both fire combat and melee.

CHAIN OF COMMAND

"We tried to keep the AI's objectives in sync with the command hierarchy," says Rose. Instead of creating a single AI routine to handle all battlefield action, Talonsoft chose to model the AI in layers, much the same as the Civil War command structure would have been.

Initial AI decisions are on the meta-level, simulating the corps commander. These directives are passed "down the line" to the division commanders. An example would be a broad command such as "attack the right wing."

At the division level, the battlefield situation is reevaluated each hour (of battle time, not game time). The condition of the battlefield, the current orders and the state of the various brigades (fatigue, routing, etc.) are all taken into account before the AI attempts any action.

Next, each division commander evaluates his own troops to see if they are all within his command radius. If not, then the first step is to order the brigades into the control radius. This action may take several game turns to accomplish. Once mustered, the division begins to advance on the objective. Once in position, the brigades are deployed, holding one or two in reserve.

At the brigade level, the meta-objective is broken down into "local objectives" generally only concerned with the four or five hexes to each side of the brigade. The brigade then seeks to accomplish the local objectives.

At the division and brigade level of the AI, the leadership qualities of the battlefield commanders come into play heavily. While the corps commander may issue



an order, a division commander may, after evaluating the immediate situation, diverge from the meta objective. This may take the form of a more "leisurely" attack if the commander is cautious, or a flagrant disregard of orders if too many troops are fatigued beyond useful function. In this way, the GETTYSBURG AI seeks to create a very real and very fluid flow to the AI processing. "Modeling a three-day battle is tough," admitted Rose. "You can only really control the first day."

The designers at Talonsoft didn't code in any hard and fast rules, such as "at this time, mount an attack on this ridge." Instead, they tried to set up situations which would make those things that actually happened in the battle likely to happen again, but, as in all "chaos theory" models, with too many variables playing out for too long, you can never tell what the end result will be. Because of the way that they chose to implement a hierarchical AI structure, predicting results past the first 30 or so hours is next to impossible.



HEAVY METTLE GETTYSBURG's AI engine factors in battle fatigue as well as amounts of men and supplies.

GIVE 'EM WHAT THEY WANT

"The one thing wargamers always want is a better computer opponent," confessed Rose. "The problem is, with grognards, they've been gaming for 25 years, and they're just too good."

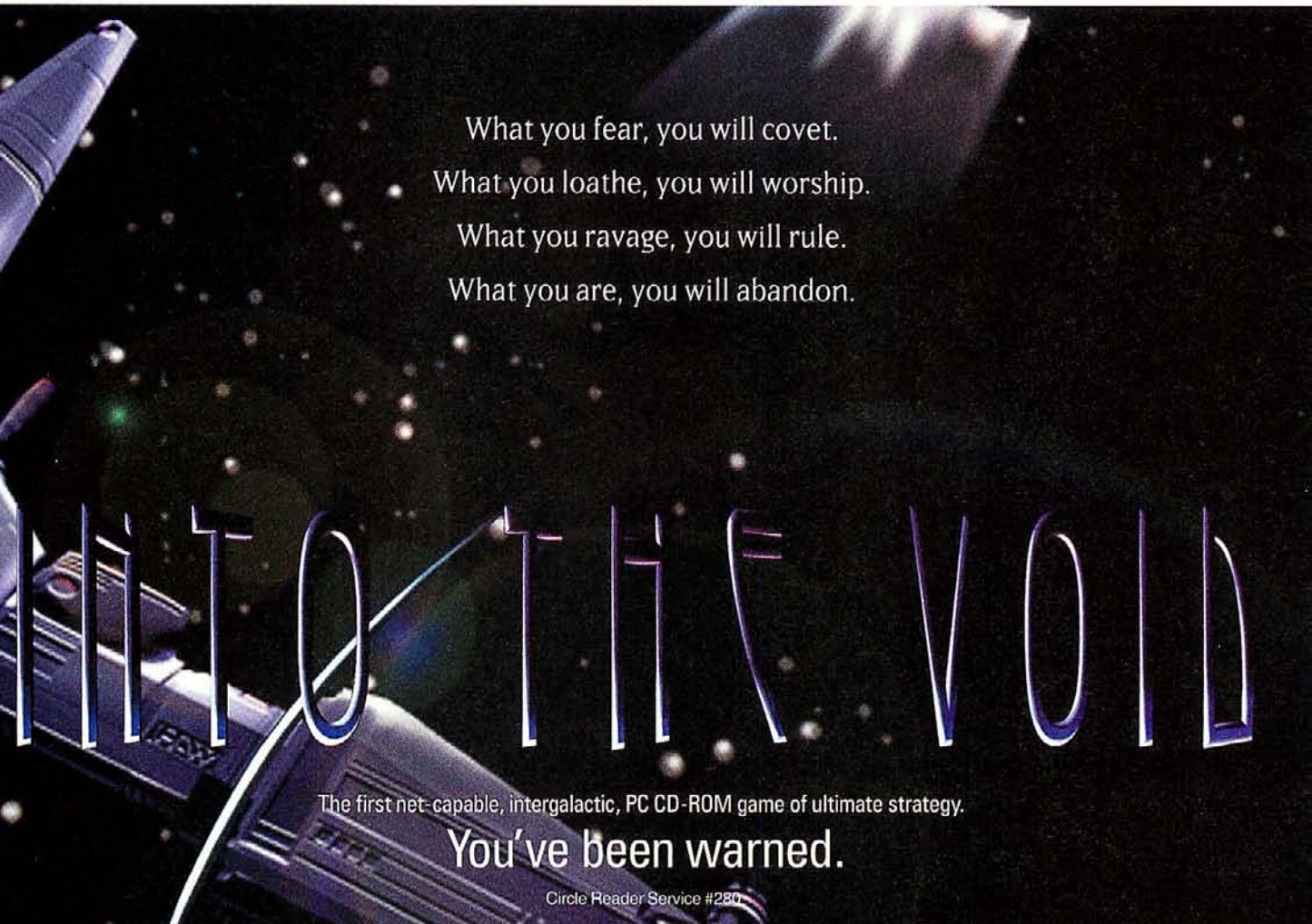
"Here's the danger too," continued Rose, "the more complicated the AI, the more tendency for bugs."

Beyond the risk for bugs, complicating the AI would also slow down the play of the game as the computer opponent searches and evaluates possibility after possibility. There comes a time when an AI programmer must simply say "enough is enough" and hope that the rules and procedures put into place will offer up enough challenge along with smooth gameplay.

"I think we've captured the essence of civil war tactics in GETTYSBURG," says Rose "We achieved far more than we expected to."



WARGAME WHINING
"Wargamers always want a better [AI] opponent," says Talonsoft's Jim Rose. "The problem is, grognards have been gaming for 25 years, and they're just too good."





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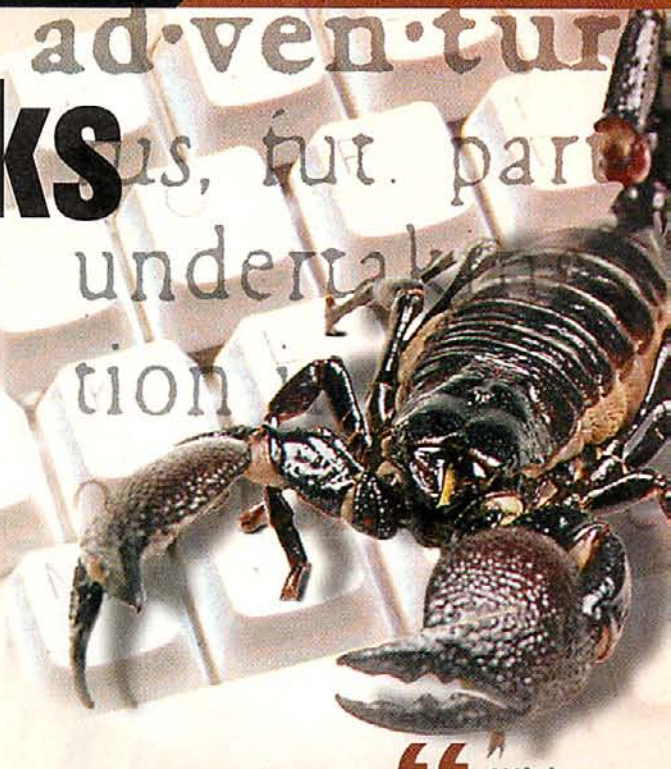
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Firing Blanks

DARKSEED II Sows A Fallow Field



In the first DARKSEED, writer Mike Dawson rents a house in the hopes of getting some work done. Not surprisingly, the work he ends up doing has little to do with writing. He soon discovers that mysterious aliens, called Ancients, are plotting to take over the world. They operate from a place called the Dark World, a sort of mirror image of our own, and nowhere near as pleasant. Mike enters the Dark World and eventually puts an end to the schemes of the Ancients. Now, a year later, Mike is back in his home town, recuperating from a nervous breakdown caused by his experiences in stopping the Ancients. He is also the number one suspect for the gruesome murder of a woman he had been dating. Before long, Mike learns that the Ancients have returned, that they are somehow involved in Rita's death, and that once again, he is the only person who can save the world.



WHO'S THE STIFF? Gone is the competent professional writer protagonist of DARKSEED I. Mike is such a lifeless sap that you wonder how the world can ever be saved.

HERO REGRESSION

In the first game, Mike is an adult, and while perhaps not on the bestseller lists, there is the impression that he is at least an established writer. Mike II, on the other hand, seems barely out of his teens. His voice is young, and has an underlying whine to it. His reactions to everything are naive and juvenile, and on occasion, downright idiotic. Further, while he's been home for a year, he's been unable to renew any old friendships, and has managed to make only one new friend (who isn't much of one).

Mike now has all the charm, intelligence, and personality of a used paper towel. If the player weren't directing his actions most of the time, Earth would be toast. Having to maneuver such a character is in itself a dreary experience to begin with, and we wonder why this jerk is the person chosen to save the world.

The story itself is hackneyed and full of stereotypes. The police are typical "dumb hick cops." Practically everyone met in the Normal World has some dirty little secret that eventually comes out during the game. Few of the characters are in any way sympathetic or likable. After a while, you begin to think that maybe the Ancients have the right idea, after all.

As an adventure, this is what I think of

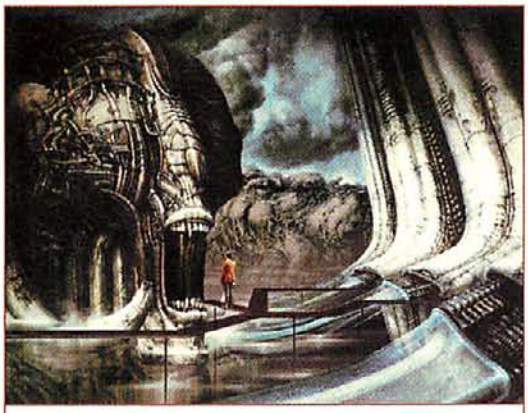
> **"With a nitwit for a hero, a stale plot, stereotypical characters, and a bizarre ending, there isn't much to like about DARKSEED II."**

CRYSTAL BALL

- INDESTRUCTABLES (nee INVULNERABLES) from Bullfrog/EA will be delayed until '97. Seems that the lead designer needed to resume his secret identity for a while.
- Buoyed by their success with A COMPLETE WASTE OF TIME, 7th Level's MONTY PYTHON & THE HOLY GRAIL sports a bigger budget and more input from the *Python* cast. We were very impressed with how HOLY GRAIL integrates footage from the movie with Terry Gilliam-style animation added specifically for the game. The Knights Who Say (well, you know) should make their frantic interactive debut sometime this summer.



COLOR ME DARKLY The best part of DARKSEED II is the artistic flow from H.R. Giger's over-active left brain.



SAID THE ALIEN TO THE FLY You'll have to brave the Ancients' Dark World "parlor" for any chance of saving humanity.



Price: $59.95
System Requirements: PC compatible 486 or better, Windows 3.1 or Win 95, 8 MB RAM, 10 MB hard drive space, Windows compatible sound card.
Protection: None (CD must be in drive)
Designer: Destiny Software Productions
Publisher: Cyberdreams Calabasas, CA (818) 222-9348
Reader Service #: 340

as a "stop and go" game. First you figure out how to get started. Then some of the game opens up, and what to do is usually obvious, for a while. Then you come to a halt, because nothing new is happening. Now you have to go back over a lot of old ground to find what you missed, because until you do, the game isn't going to progress at all.

Often, it's a matter of conversation, of having to find the right person and talk about the right thing. This can be irksome at times, especially after the Dark World is open, as now you have twice as many people to talk to and twice as much ground to cover. The game isn't so much difficult as tedious and depressing.

The Giger illustrations are easily the best part of DARKSEED II. Well-rendered, and certainly creepy, they leave you with an uneasy feeling. And while some images are not especially pleasant to look upon, none are outright revolting. It's a pity these eerie graphics weren't put to use in a better game, because DARKSEED II doesn't have much going for it otherwise. Go rent a copy of *Aliens* at your local video store instead.

Bizarre Images, Clean Interface

The game's setup and interface are simple. At the top of the screen is the hidden menu bar. Positioning the cursor there makes the bar visible, and you can save or restore the game, change game settings, quit, etc.

At the bottom of the screen is the hidden inventory bar; bringing the cursor down there makes the inventory visible. Everything Mike picks up is stored here, and there is no way to accidentally drop anything, which is a nice touch.

The cursor itself is cycled by the right mouse button through three basic icons: an arrow, a hand, and a question mark. The arrow is used mainly to indicate exits; when positioned over someplace Mike can go, it becomes four small arrows. Clicking the arrows sends Mike to the new location.

The question mark is used for finding things to look at or work with. When it touches something interesting, it changes to a question mark. Clicking that causes Mike to look closer at the item and make some remark about it.

The hand icon is used for picking up or manipulating items on the screen, such as switches and the like. When the hand is clicked on an object, Mike automatically performs the correct action with it. When the hand is clicked on a person, it begins a conversation.

You can also use the hand on inventory items. Clicking the hand on one puts the object on the cursor. The cursor (with item) is then clicked somewhere on screen to do something. For example, clicking on the carnival ticket puts it on the cursor. Clicking the cursor on the clown ticket taker gives it to him and allows Mike entry to the carnival.

Moving around town is easy, as there is a map that comes up, with the five main locations of Civic Center, Carnival, Mike's House, The Diner, and the business district. Each of the main locations has one or more others leading off of it that are reached by walking. There is a similar map for getting around in the Dark World, and both maps allow for easy passage from one world to another.

Saving and restoring can be done at almost any time, and there are ten slots for save games. A separate menu lets you adjust the volume of sound and music, and, happy to relate, turn on text of conversations. You can set for voice only, text only, or both together. When using text, you can choose to have it disappear by itself after a period of time (slow, medium, fast) or let it stay on screen until you click the mouse button.

The game runs cleanly for the most part. It did crash on me once during a return trip to the Underworld, but I avoided doing that a second time (only one visit is necessary), and had no other problems. All in all, this is a simple adventure game engine that doesn't get in the way of the story. Unfortunately, the story's not good enough for something to even get in its way. Hopefully, Cyberdreams will continue to refine this engine for better adventure game products.

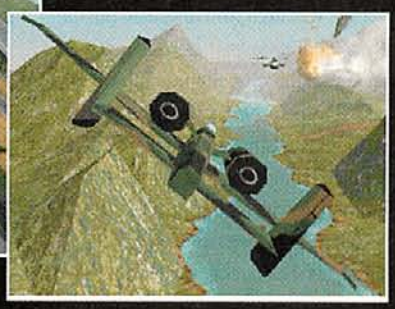
CG TIPS!

▶ Lost in RIDDLE OF MASTER LU's Peru? You can get rid of that cursed Emerald in Mocha Moche. To keep Ripley alive while he hangs over the side of the tower (trying to recover a gleaming artifact from the skeleton niche), use this simple formula: two vines equal one rope, so long as Ripley doesn't have to trust his full weight to them. —*Arinn Dembo*

▶ Which monk in MASTER LU should have which prayer wheel? Keep in mind that a monk who knows a certain prayer does not need the prayer wheel for that virtue.—*AD*

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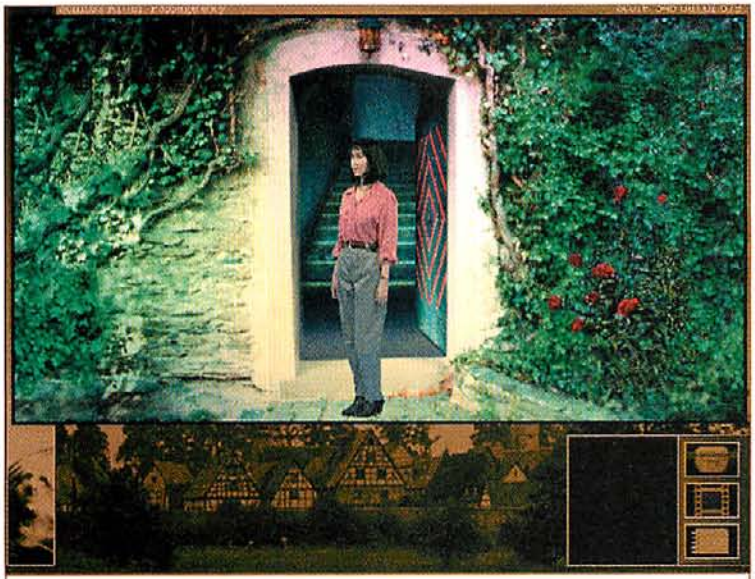
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In A Pinch?

Scorpia Leads The Way Out Of Some Tight Spaces

Seems that mysterious wall map in **Prisoner Of Ice** just refuses to open. What you need isn't obvious, nor is the location, and it's hard to see, besides. Check out the doctor's office very carefully, moving the cursor slowly, so you don't miss anything. You'll get the point eventually.



CHATEAU ROSEBUD A nice bouquet of flowers can do wonders for perking up the spirits in GABRIEL KNIGHT 2.

Anvil Of Dawn—In the Underground City, there's a sleeping imp who dreams about spells. Some people would like to "listen in" on those dreams and maybe learn some new magic. Only every time you pop in, the imp wakes up, and doesn't go back to sleep until you leave. Well, maybe if you had a little time on (in?) your hands, you could keep things quiet long enough to find out what you want to know. I don't need to spell it out any more than that.

Shannara—Adventurers looking to raise the ghost of Stenmin are having a little trouble finding a specimen of his blood (a necessary ingredient to the ritual). Since he died rather a long time ago, there's no handy corpse around to provide a donation, but perhaps something else can be made to serve the purpose. This is where you need to be on the cutting edge, and not afraid to do a little vandalism. You can learn a lot from reading books.

Gabriel Knight 2—So here's Gabe in the dressing room of the opera house, about to make an unscheduled appearance in the performance...provided he doesn't get caught, of course. Things will not go well if the singer catches sight of our hero. Obviously then, Gabe shouldn't be obvious (heh). The first item to reflect on is clouding the issue a bit, then ducking out of sight. Follow this up with an immobilization, and you'll have this problem all taped up.

Discworld—Rincewind would love to get his hands on the fishmonger's belt buckle. Very likely, you've figured out the prunes and caviar part, but that isn't quite enough in this case. Some prep work is necessary here. First, you'll need several helping arms (string them along). Then you need something that will provide the fishmonger with his just desserts. After both have gone down the hatch (so to speak), the belt buckle will be yours for the taking.

Star Trek: A Final Unity—There are two ways to reach the Unity Device and neither are especially easy. You can refuse the Chodak escort and go to the computer on your own. Then you can record the Device's coordinates before the Chodak show up again and wipe the data. This means going through the security room twice, but you only have to maneuver one person across to the door. The other way is to go with the Chodak, then use information you've picked up elsewhere to go to the black hole, and from there, about 30 light years into Romulan space to grab the light waves that will pinpoint the Device. This, alas, means fighting a lot of Romulan ships, as well as finding the right course into their territory, so you're really better off doing it the other way.

Entomorph—So Squire Warrick is crawling around the ant hill, and getting nowhere fast. That's not too surprising, since this is one area he can't conquer on his own. It's alright to poke around in there so you know the territory, but don't expect to get much done, beyond learning how to stay alive for awhile. No, in this case, you're going to have to obtain a little aid from some cousins of mine in the arachnid family, who have, as it were, a world wide web of their own.

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- **GEnie**: Games RoundTable (type: Scorpia)
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CG CHOICE

Zelazny's Legacy

Saving Time In A Bottle With Capstone's CHRONOMASTER

by Charles Ardai



LIFE IN A BUBBLE Walking around inside your own "bottled time" works better here than the timesuit construct of BURIED IN TIME. Notice the detail in the closeup, right down to the reflection in the water.

The late Roger Zelazny was a science fiction writer's science fiction writer, known for his tender turns of phrase, his quirky characters, and his gift for subtle metaphysical speculation. There's blood in most of his books, and a fair amount of action in some, but Edgar Rice Burroughs he wasn't. Given how often computer games feature subtle metaphysics and how often they feature bloody action, you might not expect to see Zelazny's work used as the basis for a computer game—not when there's still David Drake and Harry Harrison left to adapt. But we're living in a strange time, when both *Alien Vs. Predator* and Harlan Ellison's *I Have No Mouth, And I Must Scream* attract game designers' attention.

It is a pity that Zelazny didn't live to see it. CHRONOMASTER is the most consistently enjoyable adventure game I've played in ages. It's a real throwback—and I mean that in the best way—to what adventure games used to be.



Price: $59.95
System Requirements: PC compatible 486-33 or better, 4 MB RAM, 35 MB hard drive space, SVGA VESA compatible graphics, 2x CD-ROM, mouse; supports most major sound cards.
Protection: None (CD must be in drive)
Designer: DreamForge Entertainment, with Roger Zelazny and Jane Lindskold
Publisher: Capstone Software
Miami, FL
(800) 468-7226
Reader Service #: 327

SEVEN UNIVERSES IN THE CORNER POCKET

The graphics and animation are modern, of course, as is the game's interface and its design. The look on the screen is all polished chrome and airbrushed fiberglass. The computer-generated characters are a real improvement over the stiff puppets used in games like Interplay's CYBERIA or Byron Preiss Multimedia's THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES. Even the layout of the screen, with its drop-down command bar and its inset window for displaying detailed animation, is very much a product of 1996.

But the underlying tone of the game and the milieu in which it is set hearken back to an earlier era of interactive storytelling, a time when game designers aspired to evoke the great works of science fiction and fantasy literature rather than the set design of H.R. Giger or the lighting flourishes of Tim Burton. When you played the great Infocom text adventures, a world grew up around you by slow accretion, such that by the time the game ended you felt the reality of the game universe so palpably that you were sorry to have to leave it. I haven't been sorry to leave many games in the last few years; I was sorry to leave CHRONOMASTER.

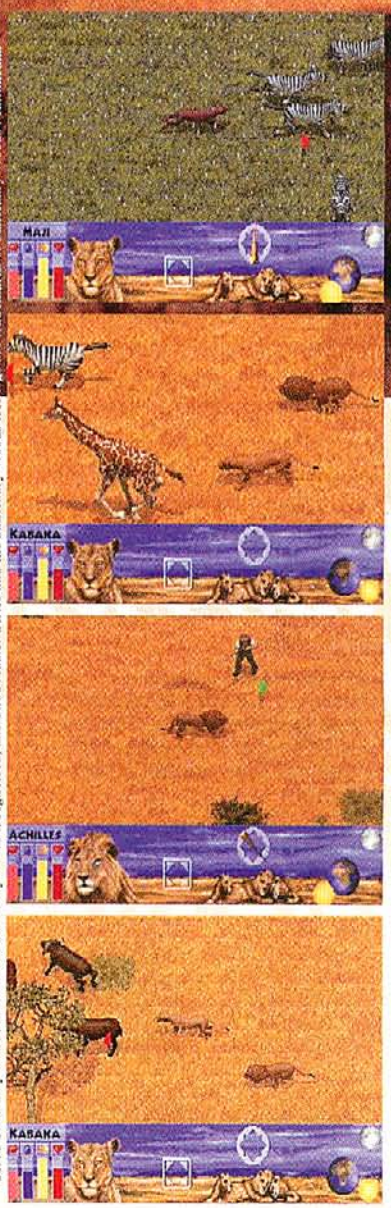
It's not that the worlds you visit in the game are strikingly novel—they aren't—or that the story is unpredictable. From the first scene, which shows a young boy escaping as his city is destroyed by space pirates, you can guess where the plot is going to go. Seven pirates were responsible for the atrocities, and now, enough years later for the boy to have grown up, seven private "pocket" universes are being thrown into stasis, one by one. No one knows who commissioned the creation of the pocket universes, and no one can guess why they are under attack. Unless, of course, they've seen the game's opening sequence. Regardless, the worlds are richly appointed, the story well-told, and that makes all the difference.

It was Arthur C. Clarke who said, "Sufficiently advanced science is indistinguishable from magic," and he is right again here. For while some of the pocket universes are slick and metallic, full of

"I just escaped two poachers, brought down a wildebeest, and kept a pack of hyenas at bay... *all before lunch!*"

Here's a game you can really sink your teeth into.

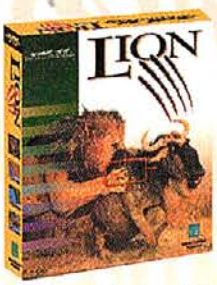
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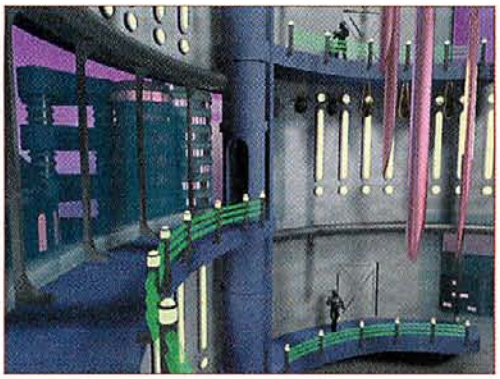
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ALIEN ANACHRONISMS The various pocket universes you visit combine the familiar with the exotic, as in this "Art Deco meets energy barrier" twist.

steel walkways and fluorescent lights, others are fanciful and resemble the stuff of legend. The first world you visit, Urbs, is spit-polished and militaristic: a giant metal statue of a warrior looms over the greenery in the city park; armored corpses litter a battlefield where a wargame was taking place just before stasis hit; in a nearby warehouse, a bound prisoner stands before a firing squad, three shooters' laser beams frozen in midair a split second before they would have obliterated him. The second world, Aurans, is something entirely different, a Tatooine-like desert planet fashioned in the style of the Arabian Nights. Here you'll find flying carpets, oases, muscular jinn and wily, snake-charming nomads, giant spiders and magic sandals. The universal tool you carry functions as a prybar on Urbs; on Aurans it takes the form of a magic wand.

The other worlds you hear of and visit—Cabal, Fortuna, Verdry, Jungen, Dyce—similarly run the gamut. Magic spells work on Cabal; games of chance are the way of the world on Fortuna. The only thing these worlds all have in common is that they've all been targeted to be frozen in stasis. Your character, a builder of universes known as "Korda the Chronomaster" has been hired by the Terran government of Universe Prime to hunt down the "World Key" at the heart of each universe and use it to jump-start time again. But each World Key has been hidden by that universe's designer, meaning that Korda has to take the grand tour, exploring every planetary nook and cranny to unearth the gears and levers that make each world run.

Korda is able to move around on worlds that have been temporally frozen because he carries a supply of "bottled time." There is a problem, though: anything he passes near gets unfrozen, too. So, how is he to save the prisoner in the Urbs warehouse if by merely approaching the shooters he will unfreeze their laser beams? On Aurans, Korda needs to cross under a frozen rockslide—but how can he, when his passing under a suspended boulder causes it to resume falling?

Such puzzles are satisfying because they spring from the story's underlying science fictional conceits, rather than just being inserted into the story out of the designers' obligation to give players something to do. Science fiction has always been a literature of puzzles: authors posit a set of rules for a hypothetical universe and then ask the question, "What would things be like in this universe if it were to exist?" It's a shame more science fiction games don't look to their premises to inspire their puzzles. It is always more interesting to imagine ways into and out of tricky scrapes that emerge from the basic premise of a story than it is to quest after some object simply because a character you meet happens to request it.

Not that CHRONOMASTER is entirely free from traditional adventure game filler. In one of the game's sillier puzzles, a half dozen jinn ask Korda to bring them "six dates of fasting," which turn out to be fruit emblazoned with crosses (representing Lent) and pieces of Matzoh (representing Passover). There is also a maze; you will feel with Korda when he finds it and says, "Swell! A maze. Sigh."

But most of what you find in CHRONOMASTER is puzzle-craft (not to mention dialogue) of a much higher order. The puzzles aren't hard, but they have what I like to think of as "heft," a certain solidity and truth to the situation in which they appear that makes them memorable.

THE VOICE OF GOD

If fine puzzles aren't enough to hold your attention, you may be interested to know that CHRONOMASTER also sports fine voice acting. Not by Brent Spiner, who is indifferent as the vengeful Milo; or Lolita Davidovich, who is awful as the voice of Korda's spaceship, the Jester; nor the various and sundry bit players who clog up the audio track with sorry cockney accents and Sidney Greenstreet impressions; but by honey-throated Ron Perlman, late of TV's "Beauty and the Beast," whose quiet calm and gravelly inflections as Korda will make any listener, male or female, want to roll over and purr.

Perlman and the puzzles, plus nifty graphics and Zelazny's cleverness, make up for the game's handful of misdeeds, such as the typos in the Jester's encyclopedia and the fact that, though there is a way to "quicksave" your position, there is no way to load your quicksave short of quitting and restarting the game.

CHRONOMASTER hearkens to an earlier time, when every few months a new classic adventure was minted for your computer. That it is filled with graphic splendor and better-than-average acting is all the more reason to savor it. In whatever pocket universe he's gone to, Zelazny can be proud.

Reflections in Amber

CHRONOMASTER isn't the first Zelazny story to hit the silicon screen. Some 11 years ago, Telarium released an adventure game based on *Nine Princes In Amber* for the Commodore 64. Despite a lot of dialogue—that is, a lot of text, with a smattering of graphics—the game did little to capture the clever characters or the depth of intrigue so essential to Amber, leaving it to die a slow death on store shelves. Thankfully, the author's participation in CHRONOMASTER was enough that we get the real Zelazny this time around.



APPEAL: Readers of science fiction, particularly Zelazny's, and fans of old-time adventure games will enjoy this quality example of both genres.

PROS: Strong puzzles that emerge naturally from intriguing situations, plus the delicious voice of the Beast himself, Ron Perlman.

CONS: The other voice actors range from poor to merely decent. Good as the story is, some of the puzzles don't quite measure up.

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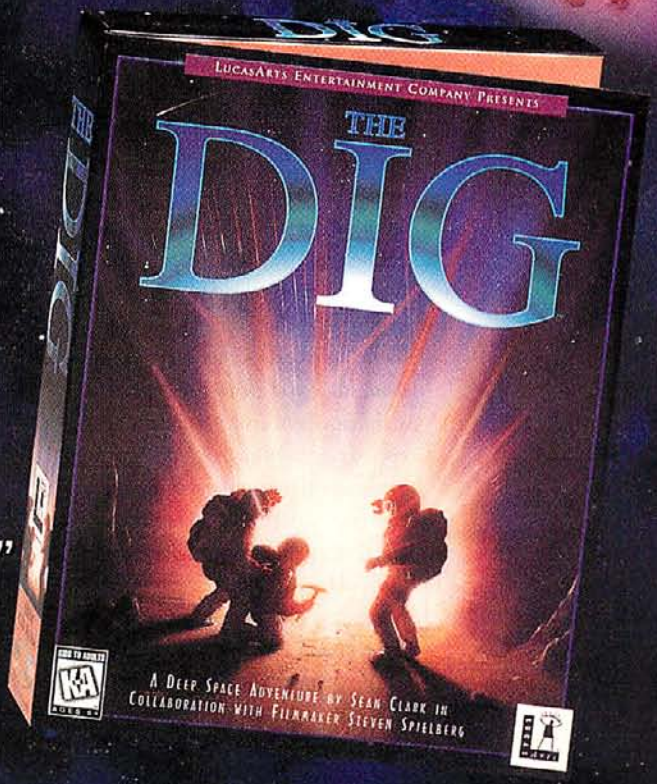
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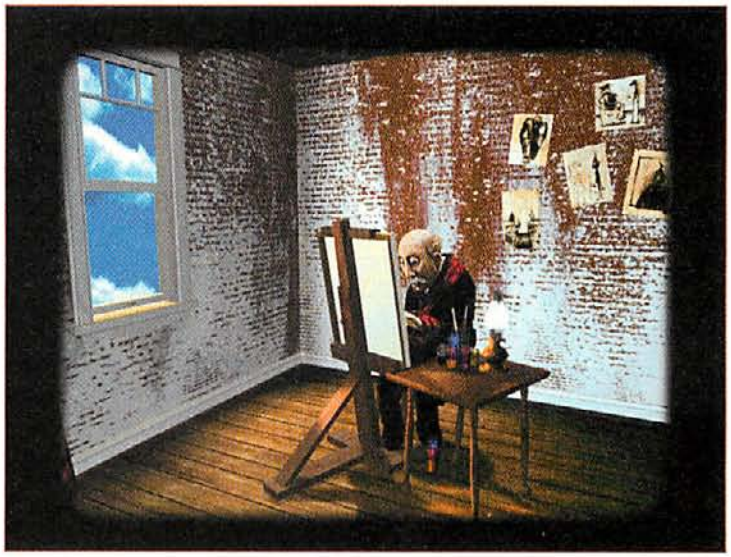
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DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

Poe Boy Is Bound to Die

Is Inscape's THE DARK EYE Naught But A Dream Within A Dream?

by Charles Ardai



WHERE'S MY PACEMAKER? Although the old codger looks to kick the bucket any minute, you have to maneuver him to the bedroom before removing his tell-tale heart.

It seems appropriate that after the wonderfully creepy ALONE IN THE DARK, someone should publish an interactive product based on the work of Edgar Allen Poe. And like the H.P. Lovecraft-inspired games from I-Motion (SHADOW OF THE COMET, PRISONER OF ICE), THE DARK EYE from **Inscape** does have some merit—but only in the way one loves a favorite author's posthumously published last novel, or the masterful but rough first sketches of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel. THE DARK EYE is an ambitious and brave and in some ways successful piece of work, but, a little like Poe's characters, it's not all there. Inscape takes three of Poe's stories and wraps them up in a frame story concocted especially for the game. You play a muttonchop-wearing gent of the 1800's who goes to call on his brother, cousin, and dotty, portrait-painting uncle in their drafty old house. Inhaling rather too deeply near Uncle's jar of paint thinner, you find yourself falling into a trance. Then, peering at a reflection of yourself (in a paper knife, a meat cleaver, the eye of a dead fish—take your pick), you find yourself hurled through time and space to land in a strange body. Are you a man or a woman? Young or old? That depends on where you saw your reflection, and which Poe tale you're unfortunate enough to have materialized within.

POYNTON CLICK

One possibility is that you have become the obsessive Egaeus Poynton, narrator of the story "Berenice." Another is that you have become Berenice herself, the sickly young cousin to whom this E.P. is betrothed. Alternatively, you might land in "The Tell-Tale Heart," in which case you can be either the murderous young narrator or the soup-slurping old man he will chop to bloody pieces before the night is out. The third possibility is to appear in "The Cask of Amontillado," where the important question is which side of the newly erected brick wall you end up on. In each of these scenarios, the opportunity to enter the head of the victim as well as the villain offers a novel take on the material; the fact that you eventually end up playing both parts adds considerably to the horror.

The interface is simple: from a first-person perspective, you point-and-click through a set of linked rooms, using a variety of pointing, grasping, and waving hands as movement and interaction icons. There is no inventory for you to keep track of; if you can pick an object up, you have to use it or put it down before you pick up another. The idea is clearly to have as little as possible stand between you and the events and atmosphere of the game.

The atmosphere is produced primarily by the graphics, which generally take up the full screen and are rendered in the vibrant, hyper-realistic style that THE SEVENTH GUEST and MYST have made *de rigeur*. Excellent music by Thomas Dolby combines with unnerving sound effects, adding to the nightmarish feel. Instead of using human actors to play the various characters, the game uses sculpted puppets with enormous noses. Instead of wallpaper, the walls of the house are papered with newsprint. These were risky decisions on the designers' part and they might not



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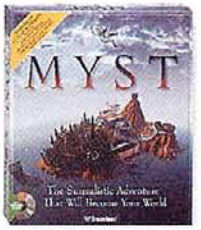
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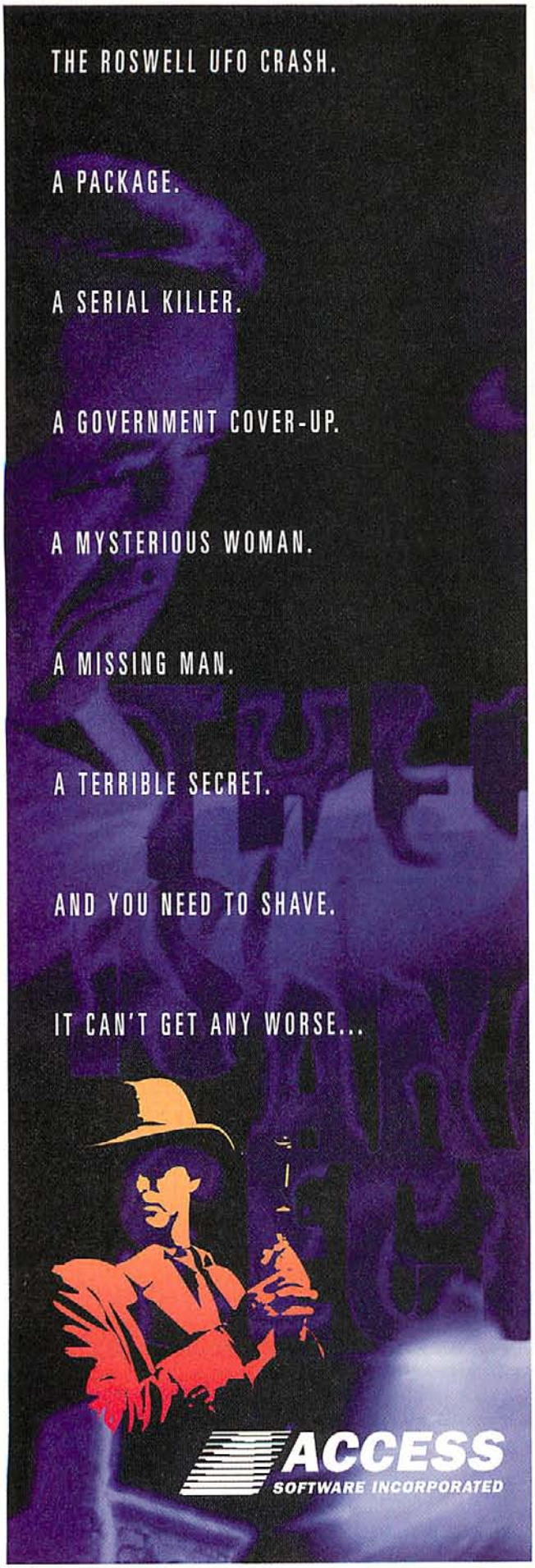
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have worked—but as it turns out, they do. You've never seen a game that looks like this one, and once you see it you won't be able to take your eyes off it. So what's wrong with the game? Practically everything else.

ROUGH CUTS

As with too many of the new "exploration" adventure games, the environment reeks of emptiness, especially at first. But it's worse here than in most: not only are there too many empty rooms, but you aren't asked to solve puzzles of any sort, not even the lame brainteasers most games use as filler. Making matters worse, there are hallways you see that, for no apparent reason, the computer doesn't let you go down; doors the game doesn't let you open; and characters the game doesn't let you click on. Even the few objects you run across—a meat cleaver, a paper knife—the game doesn't let you take.

Now, later on you appreciate why the game couldn't let you take the paper knife or the meat cleaver: they have to remain where they are for your trances. But when you first encounter them and click on them to no avail, you just think the designers have lost their minds.

Until you sniff the paint thinner, there is nothing whatsoever that you can do, but you can spend hours figuring that out. As you wander in mounting frustration, you're also likely to get disoriented due to the game's inconsistent and sloppy design. Usually it takes two moves to turn your character entirely around, but in a few rooms it takes only one. In one hallway, a door is closed when you look at it

The Poorly-Paced Heart

It is tempting to say that Edgar Allan Poe, who was orphaned at two, expelled from West Point at 21, married to his own 13-year-old cousin at 27, and found dying in a Baltimore gutter at 40, had a life as grotesque and morbidly compelling as any of his characters. But this isn't so. One of the things that makes Poe's writing so extraordinary is that this wreck of a man was able to conjure up characters even more unstable and wretched than himself.

Problem is, what works in literature doesn't work the same way in a computer game, because every event must be triggered by something the player does. Readers of "The Tell-Tale Heart" know the victim gets it while lying awake in bed. But how is one to make the old bugger go to bed? He sits contentedly eating his supper while you walk to every location in the room and try performing every possible action. Will looking at the clock do it? No. Will picking up the saw do it? No. Will eating some soup do it? No.

Finally, through trial and error, you try looking out the window. And, lo, the man goes to bed. Problem solved. But now you have to figure out how to trigger each of the subsequent events until the story ends, and what this requires is more random experimentation. Certainly Poe, if he were crafting computer games, would have paced his tale better than this.

from one angle and open from all others. In the "Tell-Tale Heart" sequence, a counter that has two bowls on it at the start of the scene is shown still holding two bowls later, even though the old man has moved both bowls to the kitchen table, where they also appear. The kitchen clock, which has just chimed midnight, can be seen from some angles to show a different time.

Then, there are all the amateurish design choices the game is full of. Why use slow dissolves every time the player moves forward? Stylish, true, but also slow, and very annoying. Similarly, why have the hand cursor be almost



POEPOURRI, NEVERMORE You picked a bad day to stop sniffing paint thinner, if you want to play this game.

invisibly ghostly over the main menu, or go through a slow unveiling every time it changes form? (Is it going to be a left-pointing hand this time or a "you can take this object" hand? You just have to wait and see.) It all adds up to a lot of waiting, a lot of frustration, and very little pleasure.

Ah, but here's the rub: what pleasure there is, is fine indeed. You must extract it slowly from the dross in which it rests, like lobster meat from a claw, but once on your fork, how sublime the flavor! To hear notorious author William Burroughs recite Poe's lines—that's worth all the slow dissolves and cursor headaches in the world.

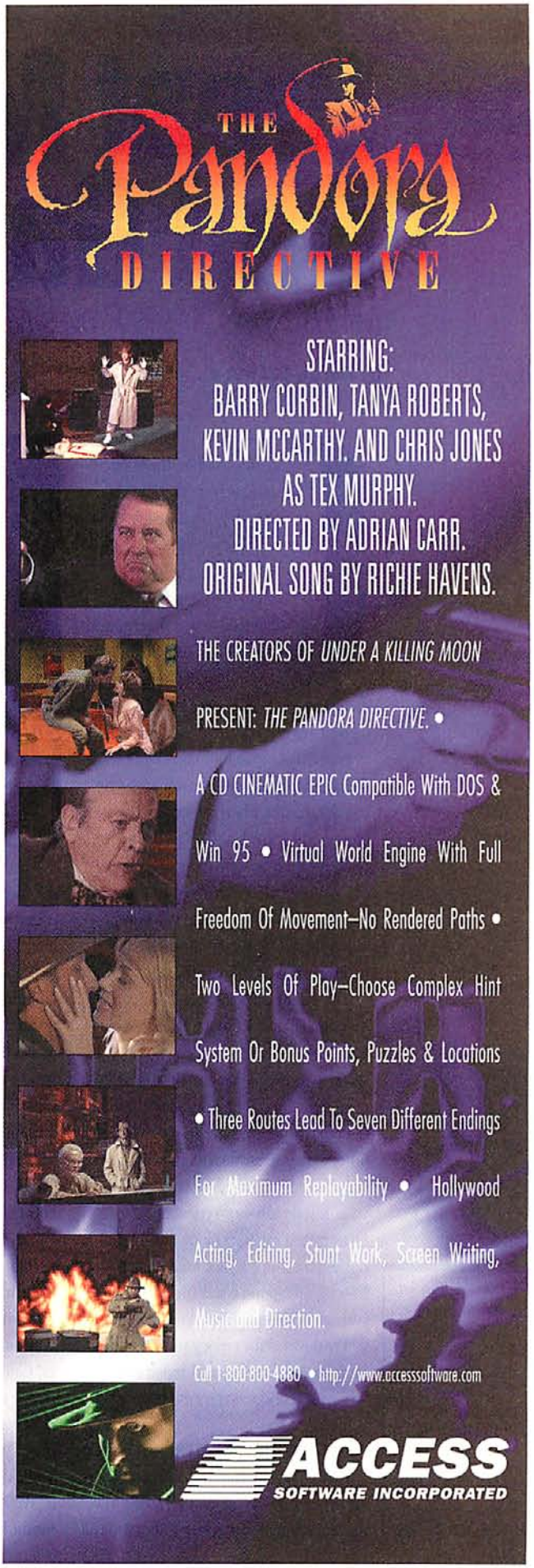
Given how poorly the game elements are handled, I'd rather have seen THE DARK EYE released as a video, or a non-interactive CD-ROM. But even in its current form, for all its errors and shortcomings, there's much to be admired. Horror fans in search of the groin-pinching, hackle-raising real thing will find a closer approximation in THE DARK EYE than in all the expertly polished Sierra titles you can name.

APPEAL: Deeper and creepier than 11TH HOUR and PRISONER OF ICE, if you can handle the serious gameplay problems.

PROS: A singular, disturbing vision equal to the task of rendering Poe's nightmare worlds.

CONS: Much of the game's design is also nightmarish: slow dissolves, objects which can't be taken until later, and impassable corridors add up to a lot of frustration.

CG RATED



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DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

Great Movie, Bad Game

Mindscape's ALIENS Proves More Horrible Than Horrifying

by Martin E. Cirulis

Certain movies define subgenres: *2001* set the Hard SF standard for decades, while *Star Wars* became the seminal Space-Opera movie. *Alien* was so ghastly and engrossing, it forever changed how movies portray man and monster in the depths of space. The horror dredged from H.R. Giger's Freudian nightmares was powerful enough material to inspire a comparable action sequel and the popular Dark Horse comic series. So, you'd think that when someone finally produced a game based on all this great work, it would be something to remember. Unfortunately, Mindscape's ALIENS: A COMIC BOOK ADVENTURE, will only be remembered as an example of how NOT to design an adventure game.

The premise in ALIENS, while decent, isn't up to Dark Horse standards—a clue that this game might be more horrible than horrifying. With a dishonorable discharge for cowardice, your tough guy ex-Colonial Marine now commands three other malcontents on a terra-forming ship. As the only ship in your quadrant, you must deviate from your course to investigate a mining colony that mysteriously ceased all contact, except for a distress signal. Sound familiar? Quicker than you can say "been there, done that," you're down at the colony surrounded by intrigue and dripping acid, trying to survive while conducting your investigation.



FROZEN FRAME Unlike the Dark Horse comic from which it spawned, this ALIENS is bereft of good characters, clever writing or tense action.

NON-SEQUITUR THEATER

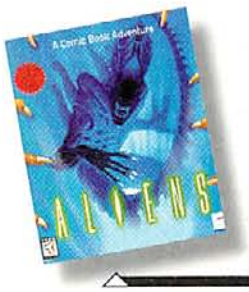
ALIENS revolves around character interaction as much as traditional puzzle-solving and combat sequences. Often you will need insight from shipmates or surviving base residents. You choose statements and replies from a menu of several possibilities, ranging from useful to lame. Unfortunately, there's not much conversational choreography. You receive useful replies that bear little resemblance to real life conversation, unless you're heavily medicated. ALIENS attempts to portray a relationship/love tension between you and the ship's angry doctor, but gems such as "Look, I realize we've got this little thing between us..." (fill in your own joke here) banish any hope of taking it seriously.

Ridiculous puzzles defuse any drama in the game. Remember the tense scene in *Alien* where Ripley uses her dead Captain's password to access the computer? Guess what: you do the same thing, but—get this—must beat the computer at Reversi in order to access the classified files! This kind of "adventure game schtick" pervades most of the game.

With this kind of frustration, I looked forward to combat. It's mostly point-n-shoot, but at least it has pretty pictures. Nice touches also include exo-skeleton armor, the ability to monitor the progress and status of fellow crew-members, and being able to switch inventory items to people who need them most.

BLOW IT OUT YOUR CARGO HATCH

ALIENS has "quick-n-dirty" written all over it. The tiny manual gives new meaning to the word "Useless." You get that sinking feeling when the cursor disappears as you pick a reply during conversation. Numerous typos and continuity errors will leave you feeling like Joel and the Robots digesting "Attack of the Eye Creatures." Primitive screen drawings slow simple acts like moving inventory items around. All of these things and more make me think that it takes more dedication to finish the game than anyone took releasing it. If you want to spend some quality time with drooling alien monsters, plunk down your bucks on back issues of the comic instead.



Price: $79.95
System Requirements: MS DOS 5.0, 486-66, 8 MB RAM, 20 MB HD space, SVGA, 2xCD-ROM, Sound Blaster compatible, mouse.
Protection: None
Designer: Cryo
Publisher: Mindscape
Novato, CA 94985
(415) 897-9900
Reader Service #: 329

APPEAL: Only for those who, like comic collectors, must have every *Alien* spinoff.

PROS: Nice pictures; occasionally evokes a mood true to *Aliens*.

CONS: Adventure game clichés and bad technical execution reduce this game to carrion.

CG RATED

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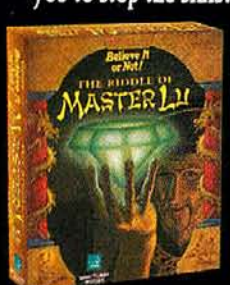
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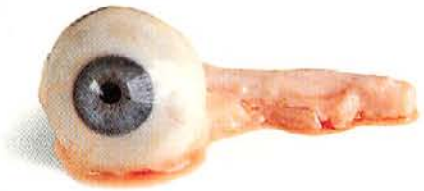
"...one of those seemingly rare adventure games that manages to merge both graphics and story..." – *Strategy Plus*

"Exotic locales, cliff-hanging situations, fast-paced story-telling, fascinating characters, diabolical puzzles. The Riddle of Master Lu seems to have it all." – *PC Gamer*

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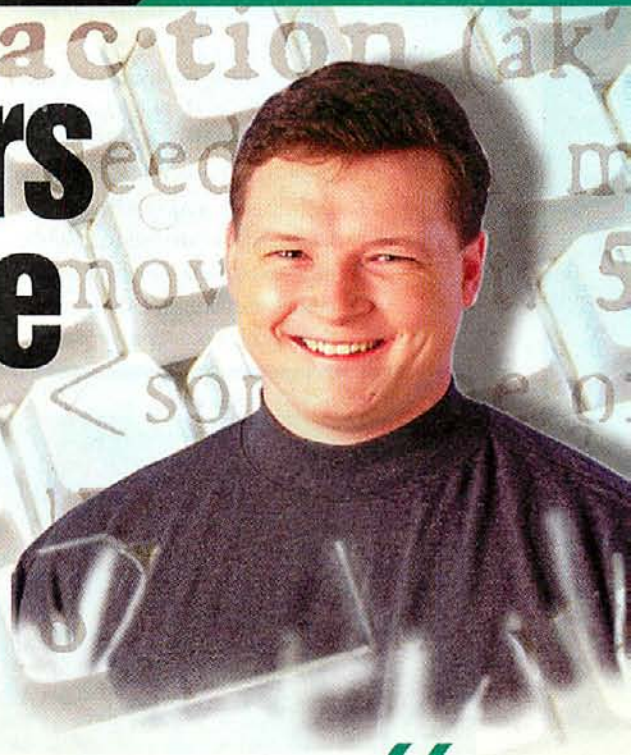
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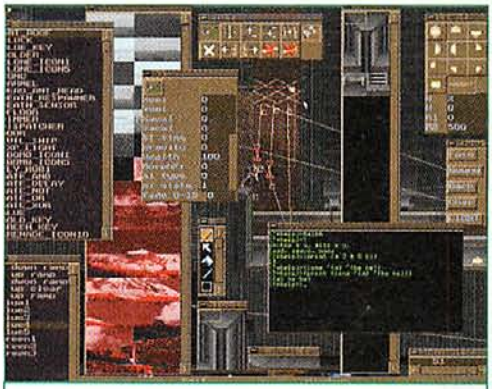
Game Editors Come Of Age

Powerful Hacking Utilities Are Starting To Be Standard Equipment



Let's face it: computer games aren't meant to last forever. Once you've played your favorite game down to the nub, it's time for something new. The usual answer to this problem is to head down to the local software shop and blow some coin on The Next Big Thing to try to put that monitor glow back in your face. But if your pockets are filled with more lint than coin, or there's nothing on the shelves that grabs your interest, or you don't have a fire-breathing Pentium to play the New Hot Game, you've got to try a different approach. Have you tried breathing new life into your favorite games by tinkering around with them, or by playing other peoples' modified game levels and missions? It's cheap, it's fun, and it'll probably teach you a lot more about how games work (and how to hack them!) than by spending more money on the latest big thing.

Okay, you've heard me talk before about shareware utilities you can use to customize games. But a new twist is emerging: instead of relying on third-party editors, hacks and cheats, game developers are starting to bundle these features into the games themselves.



ABUSE IS LOOSE You can customize the level of ABUSE with Crack dot Com's powerful built-in editor.

DOOM may have proven that user-created games and scenarios play well with the vast majority of gamers, and now game developers are taking that message to heart.

A prime example of this new phenomena is ABUSE, from Crack dot Com (www.crack.com). Instead of forcing users to hunt around the Internet to find a usable map or scenario editor, Dave Taylor and his team have simply built that functionality right into the game. Just type "ABUSE -EDIT" at the command line and you're ready to open your own scenario creation factory. The ABUSE editor gives you complete control—this isn't one of those lame-o editors that only lets you tinker with a meager few game settings. You can create new levels, new graphics and perform dozens of other functions.

> "Game developers are duking it out to include the most fully-featured game editor in their products."

THE PLOT THICKENS

So the use of game editors is an understandable bonus. Now game developers are getting wise to the additional benefits the inclusion of a robust game editor can provide. Although Blizzard Entertainment's WARCRAFT II (www.blizzard.com) isn't an action game, the success of its included scenario editor could

INSIDE ACTION

id Software is closing out the DOOM saga with a release titled FINAL DOOM, containing two new master-level DOOM episodes. Raven Software is following up on HEXEN's success with HEXEN: DEATH KINGS OF THE DARK CITADEL. If you dig side-scrolling action games like ABUSE and Broderbund's PRINCE OF PERSIA, be on the lookout for SILENCER from SSI. Programmed by Andrew Leker (of JORUNE fame), SILENCER takes place in a gritty, cyberpunk world reminiscent of *Bladerunner*. Look for SILENCER to sneak onto the game scene this summer.

serve as a lesson to all game publishers. Within a few weeks of its release, avid Warcrafters had uploaded dozens of home-brew scenarios, filling up the file areas of online services and bulletin boards. Anyone who hadn't played the game was suddenly faced with an avalanche of files, all of which required the original game to function properly.



ROLL YOUR OWN Hopefully more game developers will include scenario editors like the one in WARCRAFT II, which lets you create your own fantasy battles on the terrain of your choice.

Confronted with such a surplus of extra game resources, how many gamers do you think decided "Hey, maybe I should get a copy of this game?" There's nothing like free, consumer-driven advertising to promote a product.

What we've touched on so far is just the tip of the proverbial iceberg. Over the next year or so, we'll witness a profusion of titles with built-in game and scenario editors. This doesn't mean that third-party shareware utilities are going the way of the Commodore VIC-20; on the contrary, some game-hack developers view this new commercial interest in their domain as a challenge, spurring them on to greater heights of hacking and coding. Some shareware utilities are chock-full of impressive editing features, such as DeeP v8.35, an editor that can handle DOOM, HEXEN and HERETIC files with aplomb. With DeeP, you can print level maps, browse through textures and graphics with a keypress, and even embed sentences on the walls and other flat textures. (Look for DeeP v8.35 on most online services and major gaming web sites; I found this latest version in the CompuServe Action forum: GO ACTION, filename: DEEP.ZIP).

With this new-found interest in scenario editors and designers, a new battleground is emerging on the PC desktop, with game developers duking it out to include the most fully-featured game editor in their own products. Blizzard's WARCRAFT II may be the current king of the scenario editing hill, but the battle is far from over. Regardless of what transpires in this new-found conflict, the gamer is the ultimate winner, given more freedom than ever before to customize the game environment.

TO INFINITY, AND BEYOND

Speaking of game editors, I've decided to become one myself. It's been a privelege writing a monthly column here, and I've had a great time working with CGW, but I've decided to hit the Exit button and go to the next level. I'm joining the staff of a computer gaming magazine, where I'm looking forward to "playing the game" from the other side. Please welcome long-time CGW reviewer and game journalist par excellence Peter Olafson as the new Action games columnist next month. Thanks for spending time with me each month, and I'll see you on the business end of my BFG. Happy smoke trails!

CG TIPS!

▸Tips For The Terminator

Arnold may have been able to wade through 21st Century Los Angeles with impunity in *The Terminator*, but gamers aren't so lucky in Bethesda Softwork's TERMINATOR: FUTURE SHOCK. To help you kick some metal buttinski, here are a few cheat codes to help you on your way.

To activate any of the codes listed, hold down the Alt and the backslash key "/" simultaneously during play, and then enter the code.

BANDAID	Restores you to full health and armor.
FIREPOWER	Fills you out with all weapons and full ammo.
ICANTSEE	Gives you night vision.
NEXTMISSION	Teleports you to the next mission. Voila!
SUPERUZI	Supercharges the standard Uzi weapon.
TURBO	Speeds up game play.

▸Duke Cheat 'Em

If you get stuck in Duke Nukem 3D, try some of these recently unearthed cheats. Type them in at any point in the action. **Note: These cheat codes have only been confirmed for the shareware version of Duke Nukem 3D.**

DNCORNHOLIO	God Mode
DNITEMS	Gives you everything
DNSTUFF	Gives you all weapons and keys
DNHYPER	Gives you steroids
DNSCOTTY1X	Warps between levels; X is the desired level.
DNCASHMAN	Throws dollar bills when you press spacebar

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DUNDEE

Circle Reader Service #96

DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

Mission Generic

THE RAVEN PROJECT Boasts Four Arenas Of Mundane Space-Age Action

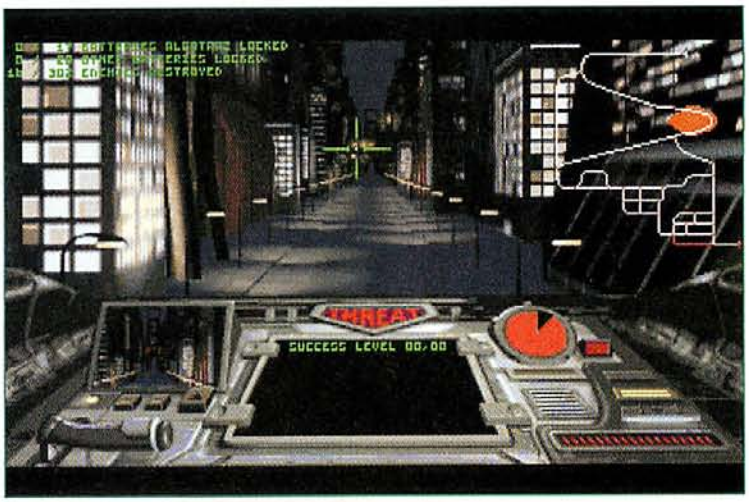
by Scott A. May

We might as well face the facts: Earth's future is about as bright as the silverware in a greasy diner. At least that's the overriding theme of most sci-fi adventure games, including Mindscape's THE RAVEN PROJECT, which beckons you to save mankind from a "cruel, forbidding future." You'd have to be inhuman to turn down that kind of challenge.

The backbone of this two-CD game is pretty generic. It's 2278 A.D. and Earth has been invaded by the Armids, a race of alien conquerors. As battle-weary space ace Danny Keller (the "Ax-Man"), you join a small rebel counter-offensive, in an attempt to rid the planet of alien forces and capture the *Raven*, a powerful Armid battlecruiser. Once in control, you assume the offensive in a series of decisive space, air and ground battles. The Armids are formidable foes, however, aided by turncoat weapons magnate Gordon Dark. Watch your back, but keep blasting forward to ensure mankind's survival.



Price: $59.95
System Requirements: IBM Compatible 486 DX2-66, 8 MB RAM, DOS 5.0 or higher, SVGA, double-speed CD-ROM, mouse; supports Sound Blaster compatible sound cards.
Number of Players: 1
Protection: None
Designer: Cryo
Publisher: Mindscape
Novato, CA
(415) 879-9900
Readers Service: #330



***CGW* OFFICES LOCKED IN, SIR** Take a warp-speed joyride of San Francisco in one of the game's early combat missions.

THE GAME UNFOLDS

After the stunning first action sequence, the first thing you notice about this game is the linear, unbranching story line. Although RAVEN PROJECT offsets this limitation by sheer volume of missions and steadily intensified challenges, it steps out of the boots of the adventure realm and enters the pure arcade domain. After each battle, your performance is evaluated and scored. Failure to complete an acceptable percentage of pre-set goals forces you to repeat missions until you "pass."

Supplementing the action is approximately 45 minutes of live-action video and between-scene animations. The cinematic direction is better than average, with ultra-dark ambiance and stylized camera techniques. The overall sensation makes you feel like an active participant in an ongoing—albeit non-interactive—movie script. The acting is capable, though often stiff and unexciting, with dialogue that could make the most ardent sci-fi buff cringe. In other words, it's on par with most efforts in the genre.

BY AIR

Action's the name of this game, and THE RAVEN PROJECT uniquely serves it. The game's most heavily touted feature is its integration of four distinct combat modes: space dogfighting, surface-skimming land attacks, mech battles, and urban shoot-'em-ups. Upon closer inspection, the only obvious drawback is that each combat mode varies only in small degrees, particularly the planet-based missions.

In the airborne missions you have limited vertical freedom as you duke it out with enemy bogeys, avoiding enemy laser blasts and performing dive-bombing offensive strikes. Cockpit displays include enemy distance and speed indicators, laser and shield gauges and an adjustable radar scope. A vast arsenal of rockets, homing missiles and the like are at your fingertips. The action gets fast and furious, with increasingly crafty enemy AI at successive levels. But don't despair—your ship is upgraded as you progress.

BY GROUND

THE RAVEN PROJECT's mechanized battles are of the up-close-and-personal variety. You'll clunk around the mostly barren terrain in your clunky metallic monkey suit, blasting clunky alien 'bots into oblivion. Isolated outposts add some peek-a-boom tactics to what would otherwise be a simple exercise of point-blank in-your-face annihilism. As the game progresses, you upgrade Mech classes; one model even allows you to punch oppo-



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Circle Reader Service #283

nents into submission. It's all an interesting twist on the usual ship-based combat, but it's a far cry from the strategic depth of full-blown mechanized combat (*a la* Activision's MECH WARRIOR 2). And don't expect the action to resemble the SGI-rendered mechs of the cutaway animations—that's just a tease. Actual battles are fought against standard bitmapped robots which, although well-animated, are graphically chunky.



FIVE O'CLOCK SHADOW Armid commander Bolgoz plots your early retirement in the fight to rule Earth.

BY SPACE

Space dogfighting offers a more liberating 360-degree arena, sans the ability to roll your ship on a Z-axis, like LucasArts' TIE FIGHTER. Instead, you employ straightforward tactics—turn, point and shoot—reminiscent of Origin's WING COMMANDER series. Weaponry and targeting procedures in flight are identical to "mech mode," so it won't take long to get up to speed. One nice difference is that you actually engage in some basic dogfighting techniques when you take to the stars.

Advanced missions, thankfully move beyond mere blasting of enemy forces, calling into play defensive escorts of rebel ships and diversionary tactics to draw Armid fighters away from a mission's main focus. Wingmen also scramble to your side in missions where you face superior enemy numbers.

Joystick control is tight and responsive throughout, auto-calibrated by the program before each battle. High-end analog flight sticks are great, but not completely necessary; all three combat modes can be played to satisfaction with digital gamepads as well. Keyboard commands help you target alien spacecraft, 'bots and ground installations.

THE EYES HAVE IT

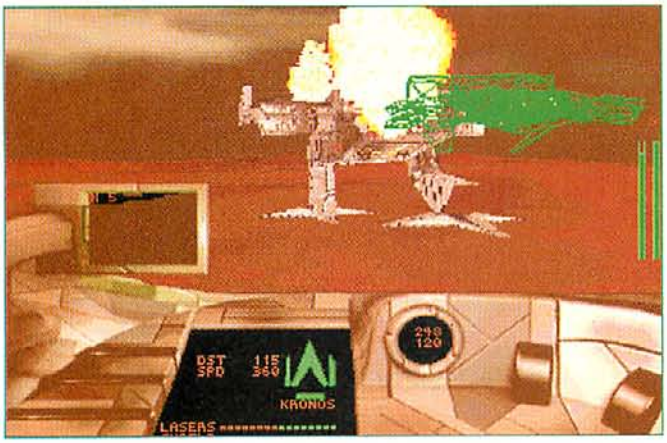
The game's most visually rewarding, but least interactive combat sequence begins the game. Here you fly a series of pre-determined paths through a beautifully rendered and highly detailed 3-D model of the San Francisco Bay Area. You can't control the speed or vertical motion of your craft, but you can choose which path to follow, using simple keyboard input and a pop-up street map display. Blaze across the Golden Gate Bridge, past the museum and through residential and commercial streets, all the while wasting the swooping formations of laser-armed Armid warriors. The mouse is used to move your front-mounted laser turret—just point and click away on this wild arcade joyride, unhampered by pesky pedestrians, panhandlers or traffic congestion.

Though tactically simplistic, this mode offers pure arcade action with the added luster of absolutely killer graphics and velvet-smooth animation. It's not enough to justify long-term interest, but it's a kick while it lasts. It's a small wonder why the designers made this the opening treat; such dazzling eye candy can't help but draw you into the game. The only problem is, in contrast, the other combat modes are something of a visual letdown.

RAVEN MAVEN?

Miscellaneous items of interest include space, air and ground training simulations, where you can practice combat tactics against any number and type of enemy units. THE RAVEN also features a Tech Room, where you can study enemy spacecraft, mech structures and weapon systems. A save game option lets you stop, then rejoin the campaign between missions.

THE RAVEN PROJECT is well crafted, accessible and fun to play, but hardly groundbreaking. Arcade enthusiasts will like the constantly shifting focus of its action, but advanced gamers demanding strategic depth should watch the skies for more engaging fare.



DRY ROASTED Mech-style warfare is one of THE RAVEN PROJECT's three ship-based combat modes.

APPEAL: PC gamers drooling over friends' PlayStation titles will get their arcade fix here. A good choice for sci-fi warriors who also enjoy a little cinematic flash.

PROS: Thoughtfully designed with a entertaining mix of mission types, between-scene animation and 45 minutes of live-action video. Graphics are excellent, with speed to burn, even on low-end machines.

CONS: Despite its variety, the game suffers from generic twitch-and-shoot repetitiveness. Lack of strategic elements and branching story line hampers long-term playability.

CG RATED

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DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

Colder Than Hell

Aliens On The Rocks Make An Icy Cocktail In Domark's ABSOLUTE ZERO

by Paul C. Schuytema



RIDE OF THE VALKYRIES Valkyries are very fast, but come up short in armament. They also have a nasty tendency to fall out of the sky if you slow down too much.

Europa, Jupiter's second Galilean moon (the other is Io), is a frightfully cold place. Some time in the distant past, water gushed out of the surface, much like volcanic lava, and proceeded to freeze in the sub-zero atmosphere. The result is a ghostly ice world, one where glacial masses shift like tectonic plates.

Fast forward to the 24th century: cold fusion drives allow mankind to move freely around the solar system. Water ice, a substance Europa has in abundance, becomes the fossil fuel of the galaxy. For over a century, humankind has had a subsistence-level foothold on this frozen moon, harvesting the ice and catapulting it into orbit using a huge MagRail cannon.

Production was fine, and life was pretty good: Europa's little mining colony soon boomed to 200,000 people. But one day an EHT (Extremely High Temperature) mining operation drilled into a large cavern containing a dormant alien race, which was not at all pleased to be awakened before noon. Before the miners knew what was happening, the gruesome aliens swarmed to the surface, consuming all in their path. Distress calls frantically shot out from Europa, but the closest military forces were over a month away.

For this one long month, the miners are on their own, fighting to survive by transforming their own mining equipment into offensive and defensive weaponry.

Such is the imposing setting for Domark's latest release, ABSOLUTE ZERO, an odd blend of ingenious ideas and rather quirky gameplay that results in an experience that's fun and fresh, but also quite frustrating.



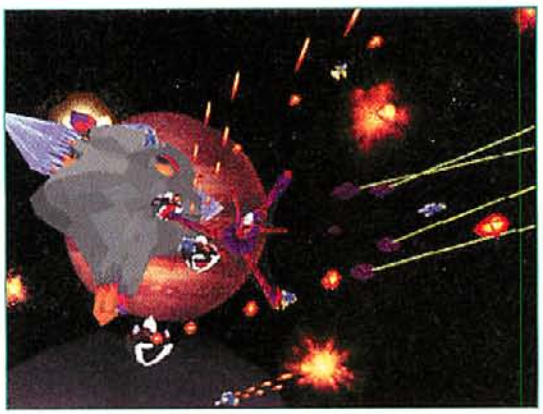
Price: $59.95
System Requirements: IBM compatible 486-66 (Pentium recommended), 8 MB RAM (16 MB recommended), 256 Color SVGA, 640 x 480 color monitor, DOS 6.0 or Windows 95, double-speed CD-ROM; Sound Blaster-compatible sound card
of Players: 1
Protection: None (CD must be in drive)
Designer: Dave Georgeson
Publisher: Domark
Distributer: Spectrum HoloByte
Alameda, CA
(800) 879-PLAY
Reader Service #: 331

STARTING IN THE COLD

The game begins in a drizzle of frustration. This DOS title can supposedly be installed from Windows 95 (a Windows 95 version is forthcoming), but I couldn't get it to work. Once I did get the game installed, I had to struggle to find the setup screen (the manual is completely misleading) and struggle to set up my Flightstick Pro—a bug in the calibration routine caused me headaches until I figured out that the first time the program told me to "Press the fire button," it meant "Hit the Enter key."

Unfortunately, ABSOLUTE ZERO's initial problems carry over into the early portions of the game. On the way back from your first mission your group encounters the aliens for the first time, but there is no mention of the aliens, nor any sense of panic or pressure whatsoever. You're the first human *ever* to see a real extra-terrestrial and all you hear is "Go get em" type banter? I'd expect to hear "Oh my god!!! Do you see what I see?! Chhh!"

In the first mission you also come face to face with the game's bizarre mission scripting, which forces you to strain your brain figuring out just what the hell you are supposed to do. Follow the Nav points and you lose. Follow your wingman and you can't drop the pods, so you lose. Success in ABSOLUTE ZERO is a thin tightrope indeed. Fortunately, Domark's automatic hint option offers up incremental hints each time you lose a mission. I would *not* recommend turning these hints off.

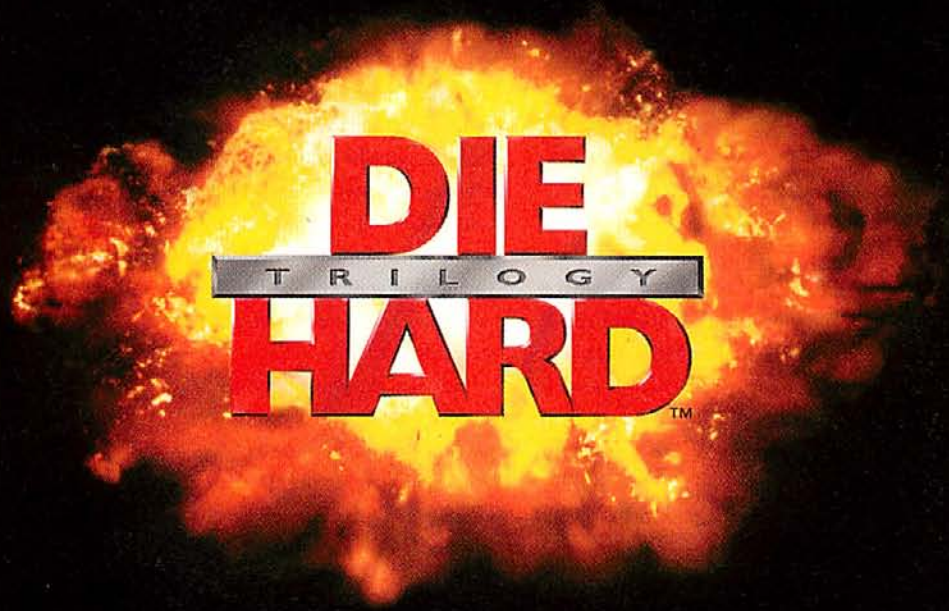


SPIN YOUR WEB A Web Flier comes in fast from the alien mothership; these slow but nimble nasties have the churlish habit of ramming colonists whenever possible.

GETTING WARMER

I bet with all this bashing, you're expecting me to say that this is one CD-ROM that would be best used as a mini-Frisbee. But that's not the case—once I sloshed through the initial garbage I actu-

"YIPPIE-KI-YAY *%@#?£!"



COMING IN MAY.

WINDOWS 95™ CD-ROM, SONY PLAYSTATION™, SEGA SATURN™

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Circle Reader Service #268

ally found a damn fun game that offers some truly innovative twists on an unfortunately stale genre.

ABSOLUTE ZERO takes you through 13 scenarios, some consisting of only a single mission and some offering multiple missions. As the game progresses, you learn more and more about the enemy and become more creative in mutating your mining equipment into an offensive fighting force.

In a neat twist, you don't move through the struggle as a single protagonist, but as multiple characters. This adds a level of realism to the game, since rarely would a single individual be the cornerstone for an entire campaign. It also allows you to perform in several different capacities and more importantly, gives the game some emotional depth.



CHECK YOUR E-MAIL Your cadre of alter-egos awaits, each with a tale to tell and an alien to wax.

Throughout the game you keep in contact with your alter-egos via e-mail messages and their private diaries. Along your salvatory journey you'll deal with politics, backstabbing, and even an estranged spouse who files for divorce just as you're fighting for your life.

Domark deserves snaps for this unique approach. The writing for the diaries and e-mail is fresh, relevant, interesting and feels like it's coming from a unique character. I felt like I was really able to get a sense of them as people beyond the struggle at hand.

In addition to the myriad of characters, you participate in a wonderful array of missions, from straight attack sorties to being a simple turret gunner on a ground craft to alien capture operations.

ICY COMBAT

The missions are carefully thought-out and wonderfully balanced, although occasionally overscripted. For example, you might hear a compatriot yell, "Where the hell are you?" when you're right next to their ship. You also have no control over your wingmen. In fact, sticking close to them is sometimes the only way to muddle your way through a mission.

But the intensity level becomes quite dramatic in the heat of battle. In fact, I've never seen a game that offers such chaotic and massive furballs. At times I found myself battling a dozen ground forces with another two dozen ships circling above. Unfortunately, this chaos immediately exposes an interface flaw: there is no "target nearest enemy" feature. This means that if you have a standard joystick you must cycle through all targets, in a seemingly random order, to lock onto your target of choice. Fortunately, if you have a Thrustmaster of Flightstick Pro you can target the alien in your crosshairs with a flick of the thumb.

In several instances, you have the opportunity to play the same scene in different roles. You may be a turret gunner on the ground and then take to the ether as a Dragonfly pilot providing air support in the same mission. You also fly different crafts as well, from the Dragonfly, your generic starfighter, to the hefty MagLock (picture a low gravity tug-boat) to the speedy and out of control Valkyrie, a sort of super speeder bike.

Each ship offers up a completely different flying experience. The Dragonfly is powerful and graceful while the MagLock is clumsy and requires the use of an additional set of left/right thrusters to maneuver properly. Figuring out the best way to handle each of the crafts is part of the fun.

Learning how to fly defensively is invaluable in ABSOLUTE ZERO; the Shards and Web Fliers attack in huge numbers, and are not afraid of ramming you. Fluctuating your speed from slow to fast while weaving is a great way to avoid the lion's share of their fire, but make sure you maintain your craft's minimum speed or you'll find yourself just another frozen casualty.

CRYSTALLINE CRITTERS

After each mission is completed, you return to the "VR Tunnel" that serves as the main game interface. From here you may catch up on your cast of characters or check in with the latest Europa News Network broadcasts. You can also check out the latest intelligence on alien technology or outfit you craft for the next skirmish. At one point you read about the terrible nightmares the colony children are having, presumably because of the stress of the invasion. Soon, it becomes apparent that the aliens are in some way psychically responsible for these night terrors.

The aliens, a form of crystalline life, are very creepy creatures, attacking with a hive-like mentality. Each mission teaches you more about them, and that's part of the payoff.

ABSOLUTE HERO

ABSOLUTE ZERO is a fresh game, offering a nice new setting (Europa) and a new way to play the tried and true space opera plot of "aliens attack humans." But the designers should be ashamed of themselves for an absolutely atrocious first chapter. Common sense dictates that the opening sequences of a game (or book or movie for that matter) are crucial; if gamers don't have an initial positive experience, they may never go back. Hopefully (for Domark), gamers will bear with ABSOLUTE ZERO's more than average "game-patience" requirement. The thrill is here, but like a world made of ice, it's buried down beneath a cold, unfriendly surface.

APPEAL: Members of the WING COMMANDER crowd who want to experience a very different kind of story, and have a lot of patience.

PROS: Wonderful sense of combat over icy Europa and truly unique gameplay.

CONS: Plenty of errors and poor design, particularly in the opening sequences of the game.

CG RATED

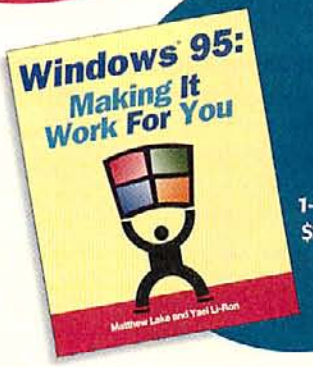
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DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

You Lose!

SUPER STREET FIGHTER II Falls On Its Face On The PC

by Elliott Chin

I am the Lizard King of STREET FIGHTER II. I've been hooked on its brutal, heavy-hitting action since it swept the arcade world in a flurry of uppercuts and jump kicks a couple of years ago. Having sunk more than my fair share of quarters into the game, it pains me to have to say that Capcom's PC version of SUPER STREET FIGHTER II sucks.



HAVING A BALL Blanka's ball attack against British super-agent Cammy might look pretty in this shot, but on screen it suffers from heavy pixelation.

GOOD NEWS, BAD NEWS

The good news about SSF2 for the PC is that all the features from the coin-op version are included. All 16 warriors are at your disposal, each with their original array of moves, such as fireballs, helicopter kicks and a slew of other ridiculous martial arts moves. And the combo system is intact, although the game is so slow it's hard to use them (more on that later).



TAKE THAT Poor Ryu isn't the only one hurting; this game suffers from poor graphics and a game speed too slow to convey the fast-paced action of the arcades

Fans familiar with the coin-ops range of moves and combos will appreciate the fact that the game controls have been ported over impressively. Capcom's bundled six-button gamepad, nearly identical to an SNES control pad, allows gamers to recreate all six punches, kicks and special moves from the coin-op and game console versions.

Unfortunately, once you get past the control scheme, SUPER STREET FIGHTER 2 loses momentum faster than those Budweiser frogs. First you'll notice the game's atrocious low-resolution looks—the fighters have chunky outlines and the backgrounds are too pixelated to resolve. I can't figure out why SUPER STREET FIGHTER 2 looks so bad; it could have been rendered in a higher resolution, or at least made better looking in low-res mode. The sound is also unimpressive, and way too weak to convey the damage being wrought on the computer screen. Punches sound more like static than the deep, bass-driven sounds I expected.

The real killer though, is the game's speed. Despite low-res graphics, it *crawls* on a 486-66. And when you turn up the frames per second the game comes to a screeching halt as you wait for agonizing seconds just to watch your character throw a jab. Sure, you can play at normal and even blazing speeds on a Pentium 133, but it's silly to require that sort of a machine to play this game. The minimum requirements are for a 486-33, so it ought to play well on a 486-66, right? Forget it.

TKO OR DOA?

No matter how you slice it, SUPER STREET FIGHTER II is a shameful port of an arcade classic. It pains me to say this, but while other fighting games might not be as good in the arcades—many lack STREET FIGHTER's depth—they were at least carefully ported over to the PC. PRIMAL RAGE, which isn't a very good game, is far better, and MORTAL KOMBAT 3's PC version is the port by which all fighting games should be measured.



Price: $49.95
System Requirements: IBM compatible 486-33, 4 MB RAM, VGA graphics, 10 MB hard drive space, 2x CD-ROM drive; supports Sound Blaster compatible sound cards and Hayes compatible modems.
of Players: 1-2
Protection: None
Designer: Capcom of Japan
Publisher: Capcom USA
Sunnyvale, CA
408-774-0500
Reader Service #: *332*

APPEAL: Fighting-game aficionados who have to have every title in their collection, or arcade fans who have to see how badly it compares with the coin-op version.

PROS: Well, it does have the original STREET FIGHTER II engine, modem play and it retains the proper game controls.

CONS: Atrocious graphics, bad sound, and slow gamespeed cripple the game before the first round.

CG RATED

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DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

Head-Mounted Dismay

A 'Virtual Reality Sports Game' That's Destined For The Showers

by Gordon Goble



HAVE BALL WILL TRAVEL Locus' sole imperative is get the ball between your magnetic pincers and go!

The idea behind LOCUS is actually pretty good. Three teams of hovercyclists battle one another in a futuristic sports stadium; the first to scoop up a magnetic ball and pop it into an enemy goal wins. It's a *Star Wars*-meets-soccer kind of sport, with just two players per side, lots of jousting, bumping and laser-blasting, and a 3-D, zero gravity arena where up is down and down is sideways. Throw in network capabilities and the concept gets even more interesting.

But, as we game fans have come to appreciate, initial promise often gets lost in the translation from drawing board to final product. Such, unfortunately, is the case with GT Interactive's LOCUS, a game that looks pretty cool on the shelf, but comes off rough, awkward and unfinished on screen.



Price: $59.95
System Requirements: IBM compatible 486DX2-66 or higher, 8 MB RAM, 12 MB hard disk space, 2x CD-ROM drive, SVGA graphics; supports mouse, joystick and Sound Blaster compatible sound cards
Number of Players: 1-2
Protection: None
Designer: Zombie Software
Publisher: GT Interactive
New York, NY
(212) 726-6500
Reader Service: #333

I DON'T LIKE THE FEELING OF THIS...

LOCUS' gray-on-gray main menu, with buttons haphazardly scattered about and odd typeface immediately clues you in to this title's fantastically unattractive nature.

It also serves to illustrate that LOCUS is not very complex. The menus serve as a logbook in which to access the game's very few statistics and personal records, a between-game rest spot, and that's it. A few gameplay preference options like window size, keyboard remapping and a very brief backgrounder are also here.

Where you play, who you play against and equipment choices are all predordained. It's so darned easy that even those who blissfully skip through manuals and menus right into the game (c'mon, be truthful) won't find themselves laboring. This easy learning curve, as I quickly discovered, is one of the game's few positive attributes.

You begin alongside your competitors in an entry chute that leads to the first of 12 arenas. A Majel Barret-style synthetic female voice announces the countdown before impact, and off you go, using the keyboard to accelerate and a joystick or mouse to direct your craft (a very confusing explanation of this is supplied in the manual). One button fires your lasers, the other activates and deactivates the ball magnet on the nose of your cycle.

After zipping into the arena (each is shaped differently, and they become increasingly more sophisticated), a metallic ball or two pops up. The goal is to grab the ball, maneuver it toward an opponent's goal (which looks like a hole in the ground) and blast it home.

1 X 1 X 1 X 1=1

The big problem is that LOCUS' awkwardness is only amplified during the action. Graphics, while semi-virtual, consist of minimally or non-shaded polygons with barely a hint of lighting. Depth of field can at best be described as subtle—background art is almost interchangeable with solid objects, and a quirky perspective messes things up even more. There is no dashboard or instrument panel, save for crude "score bars" at the top and sides of the display. Even the lasers are plain in the extreme—no explosions, no smoke and no special effects.

Win a round and you move up to new and improved machinery. But no matter what you do, the excitement level remains the same: boring and unimpressive. Grab the ball, drive it home, shoot someone. Grab the ball, drive it home, shoot someone. Again and again you will perform this monotonous task, all the while trying to decipher why one craft appears to merge with another in one instant and crash into it the next. It's chaotic to be sure, and, aside from some initial stimulation, not a heck of a lot of fun.

LOCUS' tag line bills itself as "a virtual reality sports game." Well, as time marches on, this product may be looked back on as the forefather of virtual-reality gaming for the PC, head mounted displays and all. Right now, though, it's not much. Not much at all.

APPEAL: Action enthusiasts who just can't get enough new titles or are desperate to use their new head-mounted display.

PROS: A cool idea, some brief initial thrills, and head-mounted display support.

CONS: Dreary interface, ugly, confusing visuals and repetitive gameplay.

CG RATED

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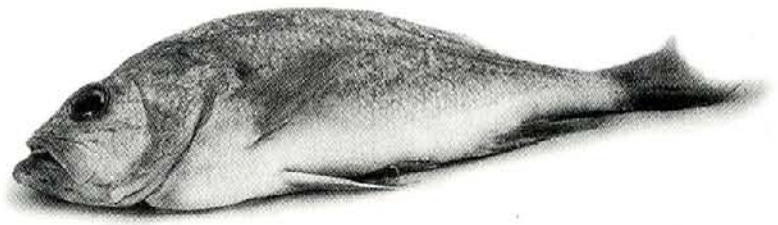
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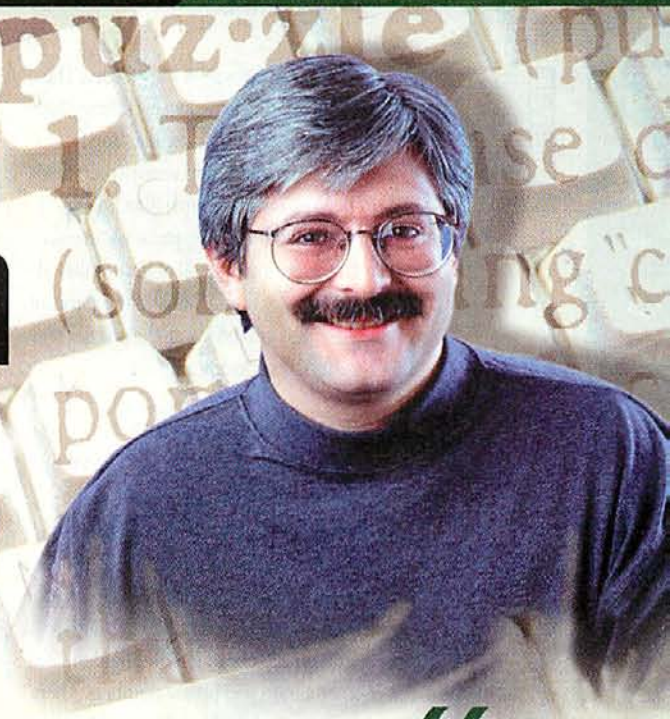
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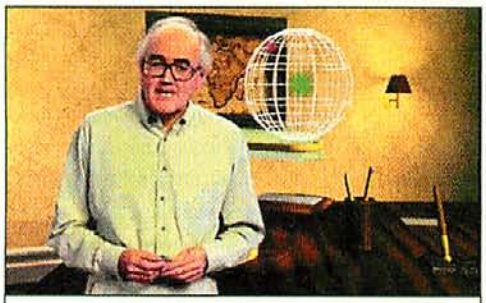
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Make The Connection

James Burke Weaves A Winning Web In Discovery Channel's CONNECTIONS



James Burke is one of those multi-talented people with so much energy that you'd hardly be surprised if he ignored middle age and entered the Olympic Marathon. Of course, if Burke did actually go to Atlanta, he'd find time between heats to discuss how the devastation of the city in the Civil War somehow relates to current advances in bio-technology, or why nobody has Georgia peaches with their vanilla ice cream anymore. You see, James Burke's great talent is finding connections between things that, to you and me, seem hopelessly unrelated. One of the most enduring documentary TV shows of the past two decades was Burke's *Connections*, which blended historical fact with clever characterizations of famous artists, inventors and statesmen, all tied together with Burke's irrepressible enthusiasm and unique take on the scientific method. The show was so successful that it engendered a best-selling book and a well-received TV sequel, *Connections 2*, and the original can still be seen nationwide on The Learning Channel.



INNER SANCTUM James Burke may appear anywhere from the cozy confines of his office to the inside of your teacup to tell you how polythene helped the Allies win WWII, or other interesting tidbits.

IT'S A CD-ROM CLEANSER! A MULTIMEDIA DESSERT! IT'S BOTH!

If any of this sounds too dry or intellectual, you simply don't know what you're missing. Regardless of whether you're a fan of the TV show, or you just like a good challenge, you're in luck, because Discovery Channel has captured the essence of Burkedom on CONNECTIONS CD-ROM. What CONNECTIONS really *is*, is open to debate. It's described as "an interactive strategy game," as "an adventure game" and several times as "a mind game." All those elements are there to a degree, and the Discovery Channel folks are obsessed with making sure that we know it's "Multimedia," lest somehow we feel the entertainment value might hide the mental stimulation aspects. And while I fear this revelation might tear the widely-cast marketing net, CONNECTIONS is really just a superb puzzle game. Although it does possess the obligatory MYST-like crisply-rendered images, CONNECTIONS avoids the clichés of Multimediocrity through a series of clever puzzles, and a healthy dose of James Burke.

In fact, the best thing about CONNECTIONS is that there is very little

> **"The Discovery Channel has finally found a way to use their multimedia experience to good advantage in the CONNECTIONS game."**

CHECK!

▶One of the most entertaining products I've seen lately is the upcoming Saturday Night Live Goes Political, featuring 20 years of biting satire. The surprise is the more than 20 games in the package, including a wild version of "Whack-A-Mole" with Newt Gingrich slamming his way through the Contract With America, and a "Pac-Bill" with President Clinton trying to eat as many carryout fries as possible before alert secret service agents wrestle him safely to the ground. ▶In the "no idea is too old to be recycled" department, Merriam Webster has redone WORD CRAZY FOR WINDOWS CD-ROM. Some of the games, particularly the "missing Link" word-link puzzles, are challenging; but for those who have seen games like YOU DON'T KNOW JACK, the interface and graphics will probably look a bit dated.

TERRY COLEMAN

CG CHOICE

DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

plot to get in the way of the puzzles. The structure of the game loosely follows the format of the TV show, where Burke draws connections and weaves them into "The Web"–Burke's term (that he was using long before the current fascination with the Internet) for all of the combined knowledge of humankind. In the game, of course, you are solving all the puzzles and making the connections.

GHOST IN THE MACHINE

And what puzzles they are! The Web According to Burke isn't bound by the normal laws of time or physics, which makes for some innovative–and difficult–puzzles. On the first level alone, you use techniques the equal of any hard-boiled private eye to uncover hidden safe combinations and phone numbers. Then you don your Mr. Wizard hat and try to figure out what an oscilloscope, a sword and some phosphorus have in common. As you make difficult connections between objects, chemical processes, historical data and the like, Burke appears, and in better than usual multimedia fashion, congratulates you and puts your achievement into perspective. (Ah, if only I'd had a virtual Stephen Hawking to help me with theoretical physics…)

But Burke isn't the only one with memorable bits. What's ironic is that even with no real plot, this puzzle game has more engaging characters than the usual MYST-a-like. Bob the Repairman, for example, is appropriately crusty until you have some money to spend in his shop. What other game gives you James Watt, inventor of the steam engine, telling you what's wrong with your steam pump? My favorite cameo, though, is Galileo's reaction when you try to open his lunch box.

About the only real theme, insofar as this game can be said to have one, is the triumph of knowledge–creating order out of chaos. So if you must be a purist about it, CONNECTIONS does work on more than one level. Chances are, though, you'll have too much fun adjusting sextants, firing cannon, baking pies, and learning how lawn bowling saved the English from the Spanish Armada, to worry much about higher learning. If your outlook on life changes a bit, well, that's what good games are for, right?

SNARED IN THE WEB

Nothing is ever perfect; and sometimes the degree of chaos reaches a crescendo sufficient to intimidate even the most nimble of puzzle-*meisters*. Certainly, CONNECTIONS requires non-linear thinking, but when you finally solve the puzzles, the process–and the payoffs–are a lot more satisfying than in games like THE 11TH HOUR. The designers were even thoughtful enough to include tips easily accessible from the interface. Honestly, I can't even recall a game of *Trivial Pursuit* that touched on so many topics: archeology, combustion, Egyptian myth, missile trajectory, navigation–the list goes on and on, and none of it was boring.

For instance, I've always said that mazes are the last refuge of the lazy or untalented designer. Yet, I found the maze in CONNECTIONS actually pretty fun, because it was based on the principles of hydraulics (a subject which, incidentally, I found totally dull in college). Instantly, I became the Mad Plumber, adjusting the flow of water without the cynic in me stopping to think, "You know, this is a lot like flipping levers in an adventure game," until after I had moved on to the next challenge. Such clever twists enliven the entire game, without artificially extending it. Even so, CONNECTIONS took me longer than I expected to finish, a nice surprise in this era of the "10-hour game with 45-minutes of video" product.

CG-ROM

▶For some insight into James Burke and his experiences in making CONNECTIONS, see our interview on the CG Website http://www.zdnet.com/~gaming



Price: $49.95
System Requirements: **IBM** 486-33 or better processor, Windows 3.1 or Win 95, 8 MB RAM, 256-color VGA graphics, 2 MB hard drive space, 2x CD-ROM, Windows compatible sound card, mouse. **Macintosh** 68040 or better better, System 7.0 or better, 8 MB RAM, 2 MB hard drive space, 640 x 480 display color monitor (256-color).
Protection: None (CD must be in drive)
Designer: Some Interactive with James Burke
Publisher: Discovery Channel Multimedia Bethesda, MD (301) 986-0444
Reader Service #: 341

▶**APPEAL:** If you thought JEWELS OF THE ORACLE or THE 11TH HOUR was neat, you'll be in conundrum heaven with this one.

▶**PROS:** Perfectly captures the sense of wonder from the original TV series. The multimedia clips and acting are nice, and James Burke is, well, James Burke. A wonderful challenge–the best pure puzzle game yet for the computer.

▶**CONS:** Even with the hints, there aren't many obvious solutions to the tough puzzles. Those wishing for a real adventure game may be slightly disappointed, but if you accept CONNECTIONS for what it is, there isn't much else to dislike.

CG RATED

CG TIPS!

Tips For Playing Connections

▶The hydraulics puzzle is similar to a water maze, where you must control the flow of water from the input pipe to the meter with no overflow. If you missed the hint on the wall, the black arrow on each valve means *Up=off, Down=on.*

▶In level two, the dry goods store is the right place to go (buying things/economics is a recurring theme), but the proprietor won't take your silver coin. You'll need some gold, which means getting the rest of the map from the miner. There's no other solution, sorry.

▶If you break into the bank only to find yourself arrested, *don't despair.* Remember, this is *not* an adventure game; it isn't *supposed* to make sense. Go with the flow and "dig around" once you get to prison.



KIDNEY PIE & SPAM These well-dressed Elizabethan fellows are just as fond of condiments as you are. Think about some creative things you could do with a bottle of ketchup, and it might help your money situation.

CONNECTIONS

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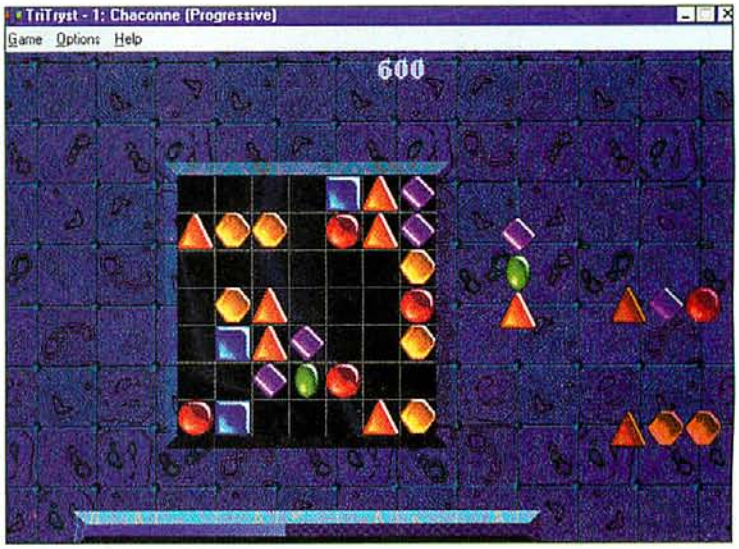
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DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

Tetris With A Twist

Virgin Places New Tiles, But Doesn't Corner The Puzzle Game Market

by Mark Clarkson



MASONRY MONOTONY Progressively challenging levels and eye pleasing shapes aren't enough to counteract the constant repetition of laying tiles.

As you might infer from the name, TRITRYST is reminiscent of TETRIS. You play by placing colored tiles—which arrive in every combination, streaming endlessly up or down one side of the screen—onto a checkerboard-like play area. When three or more of a kind line up horizontally or vertically (not diagonally) those tiles disappear. The more tiles you can take out at once, the more points you score, and there's a big bonus for taking out multiple rows and columns.

You could go on playing forever, clearing out old tiles as new tiles appear, except that clumps of unplayable tiles tend, like bureaucrats and cholesterol, to accumulate. Some levels, in fact, sport holes, zigs, zags and peninsulas, creating areas that cannot possibly be played on and cleared. Eventually you run out of places to drop your tiles and the game is over.

Tiles usually appear in groups of three in a simple line, but they also turn up bent into L-shapes, in twos, or even alone. There are also bonus tiles which add to the value of a row or column cleared, wild cards which match any tile, and blockers which match nothing at all, which can only be removed by building other rows or columns adjacent to them.

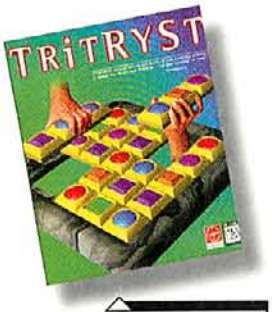
FIVE-TRYST FUN

TRITRYST offers five different methods of play, including head-to-head. In the "classic" game, you select a playing board of varying difficulty, from the simple large rectangular board to tougher board broken into small sections or skewed in odd ways. The "progressive" game plays much the same as the classic, but over a progression of boards. As you score points, each level gives way to the next. Finish them all and you start over at the first level again, but this time with more blockers and fewer bonus tiles.

You can play both classic and progressive games in either of two modes: strategy and arcade. In strategy mode you can take just as long as you like to place your tiles, carefully arranging them for maximum playability and score. Games can take minutes or hours. If that's too sedate for you, arcade mode throws combinations of tiles at you from the top of the screen at a steady pace. A special arcade mode allows head-to-head competition over a modem or network.

TRITRYST's easy-to-use editor lets you design your own levels and customize the frequency of bonus tiles, blocks and so forth, selecting from five sets of tiles, including pebbles, leaves, and butterflies. Each tile set has its own backdrop, music and sound effects. They're pretty enough, although I found some tiles difficult to see against their respective backgrounds.

The music is OK, albeit repetitive. In fact, like most solo games before it, the whole darned game is essentially repetitive—that's part of its lure. It eventually induces a zombie-like trance in those susceptible to its charms.



Price: $29.99
System Requirements: Windows 95 only; IBM compatible 486-33, 8MB of RAM, 1MB video card, 3.5 floppy drive or 2x CD-ROM drive, SoundBlaster compatible sound card.
Protection: None
Designer: Cinematronics
Publisher: Virgin Interactive Entertainment
18061 Fitch Avenue
Irvine, CA 92714-9841
(800) 874-4607,
(714) 833-8710
Reader Service #: 334

APPEAL: Less frantic than Zoop and fully customizable, TriTryst can be enjoyed by anyone who can wield a mouse.

PROS: Easy to learn, clean interface, fully customizable—a solid solitaire puzzle game.

CONS: Once you've seen five seconds, you've seen the whole game.

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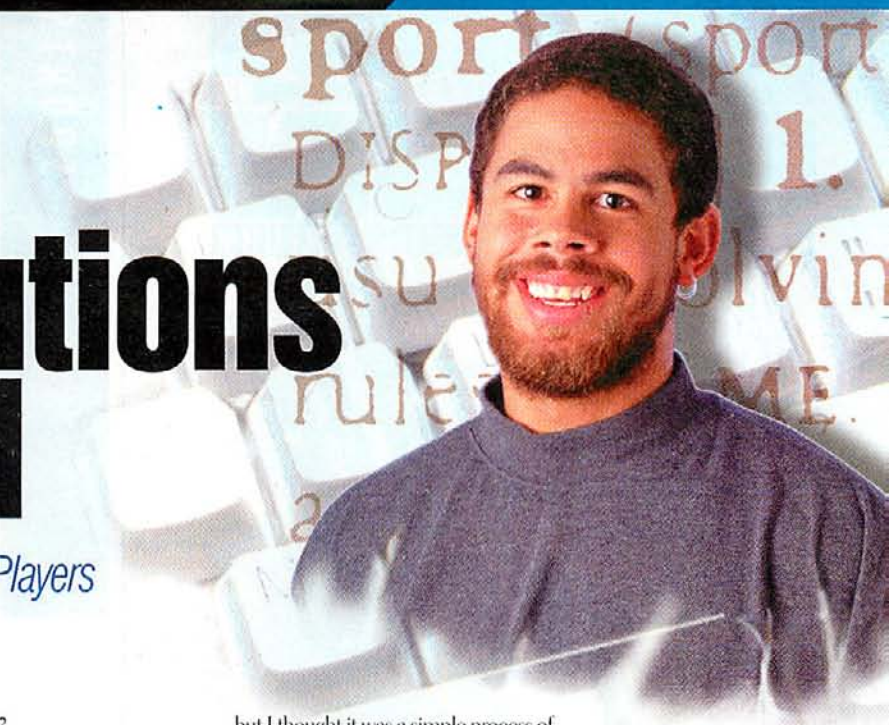
PlayStation PC CD-ROM

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Circle Reader Service #40

No Substitutions Allowed

You Gotta Pay To Play With Real Players And Teams



Are you like me? I have a hard time even picking up a sports sim if I can't compete with the multi-million-dollar players I read about in the newspaper every day. What fun is playing against the Dallas Cowboys if you're not lining up against Emmitt Smith? And how realistic can a baseball simulation be if you have to pitch to guys named Joe Generic instead of Ken Griffey Jr.?

PC sports fans have come to adhere to Electronic Arts' assertion that if it's in the game, it better be *in* the game. If the players aren't real, we're pissed. If the teams aren't real, we're pissed. If Dodger Stadium doesn't include L.A. smog and sell Dodger Dogs, we're pissed. But while this clamor for The Real Thing means a better experience for gamers, it also means less profit and more headaches for computer game makers.

WAIT YER TURN!

I've always taken licenses for granted. Obviously someone was paying somebody for the rights to all these real players, but I thought it was a simple process of wowing some NFL marketing guy with a few razzle-dazzle graphics. Nothing could be further from the truth. Each league has licensing reps or teams who meticulously examine every licensee applicant, and they're surprisingly in the know when it comes to computer and video games. "Most of them [licensing reps], with the exception of Major League Baseball, are fairly savvy and ready for new technologies," says Doug Whatley of Overtime Sports, which is currently working on ABC MONDAY NIGHT FOOTBALL.

Why the big league concern? Because major league teams and athletes are well-known properties, who, like any actor or actress, make a living off their names. The unauthorized use of their names for profit concerns them, as does a crummy product with their logos all over it.

The NBA is picky in the extreme about whom they grant licenses, as is the NFL—they both have established products with huge fan bases already. The NHL, on the other hand, a league still trying to build popularity, is fairly open to NHL-licensed products. And from the sound of things, Major League Baseball has no consistent ideology, as usual.

THE PROCESS

Negotiating a license from scratch can be a tedious process involving the usual

> "If Dodger Stadium doesn't include L.A. smog and Dodger Dogs, we're pissed."

ON DECK

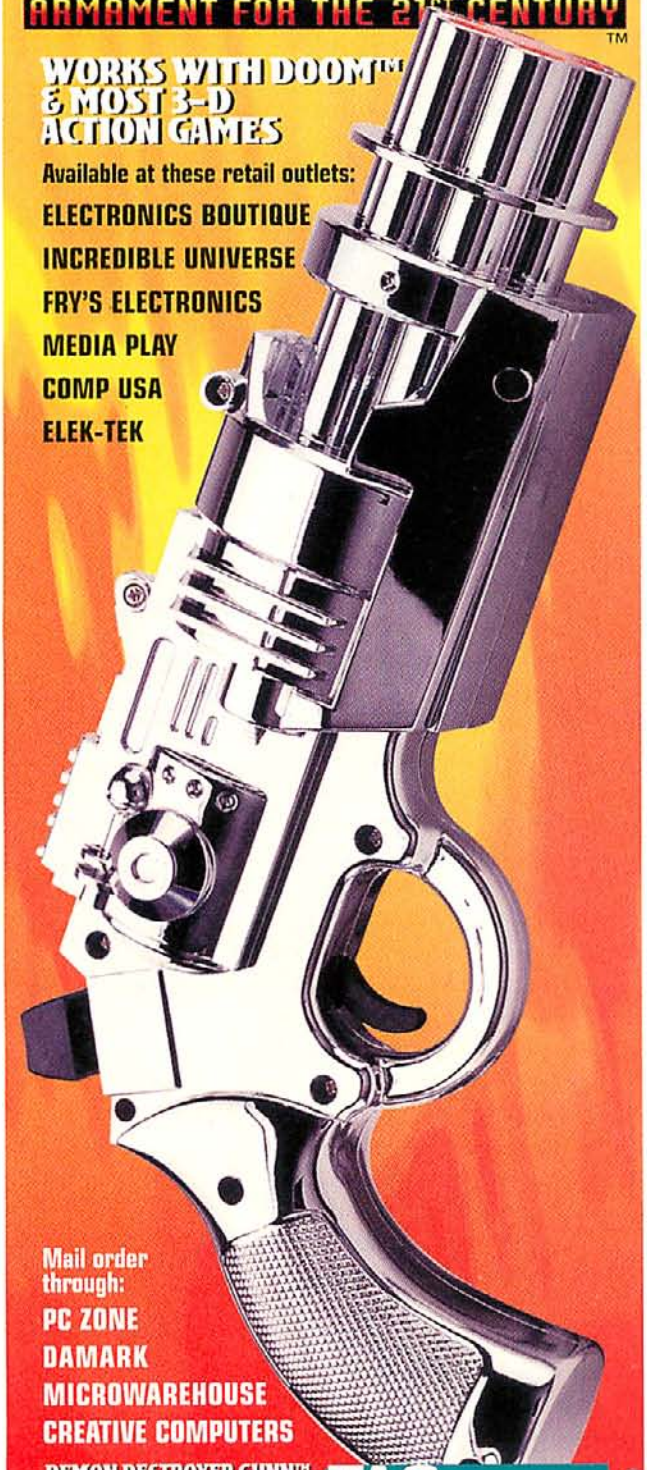
Fans of Epyx' classic SUMMER GAMES series, rejoice! BRUCE JENNER'S WORLD CLASS DECATHLON, by Interactive Magic, will put you back on the track just in time for the Summer Olympics, with 3D graphics. Fans fearful for their keyboard and joystick need not worry: DECATHLON will use a less strenuous golf-like interface... As mentioned above, Overtime Sports, an ABC/Spectrum HoloByte subsidiary, has two football games in the works for the fall: Monday Night Football and ABC College Football. Both will incorporate real life announcers. This means Al Michaels, Dan Dierdorf and Frank Gifford calling the shots in the pro game, and better yet, Keith Jackson ("Fummmble—and the Aggies have the football") in the college game...

JOHN MADDEN FOOTBALL for the PC (Electronic Arts) has slipped yet again. Rumor has it that this time, we'll have to wait until the fall to get a taste of EA Sports pigskin on the PC...

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Circle Reader Service #211

GEORGE JONES

"what's in it for us?" type discussions. But they're not completely single-sided. "We view licensors as strategic partners," says Debbie Pinkston, Marketing Director at Accolade (HARDBALL 5, UNNECESSARY ROUGHNESS 96) — "we want the real players and they want the exposure."

The bottom line, of course, is money. Royalties are key — in negotiating a deal with Accolade, the NFL will base their requested royalty percentage based on how big the company is and how big a product release is planned. The totals quickly add up. "The NFL enters negotiations assuming you're going to pay 10 percent to them and the NFLPA (Player's Association) in total," Whatley states. While this is at the high end of the royalty spectrum (5-10 percent is the usual range), even five percent of the profits from every sale is a lot, especially considering today's million-dollar productions and $50 price tags.

After negotiations have finished and an agreement has been finalized, both parties tend to work off of a formal/informal agreement while the deal is finalized, according to Pinkston. "Finalizing the deal can take forever, so once we get a working agreement done, both parties will work off of a letter of intent," she says.

THE GOOD OLD DAYS

Realizing how potentially valuable licensees can be to their product, major league teams have really gotten it together in order to make the process as painless as possible. Take players like Jerry Rice for example, who don't belong to the NFLPA. In the past, a company would have had to approach Rice's agent and negotiate a separate contract with him if they wanted him in the game. But now, the NFLPA takes charge of these instances and has already signed special agreements with such players.

Furthermore, organizations like NFL Players Inc. will sign up ex-players for licensees, ensuring that the old guard gets their due, and making life considerably easier for game companies. For their college football game, Whatley was able to go straight to the CFA (Collegiate Football Association) and procure a contract for every team (using college players' names is illegal due to their amateur status).

IT'S IN THERE

Of course, all of this talk about business deals and negotiations have me longing to play a different kind of game. I'd love to see an NBA Tycoon kind of game. Wouldn't it be great to run your own team from the business side of things, worrying about salary caps, player strikes and, of course, licensing deals. I wonder if you'd have to pay a licensing fee to use David Stern?

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DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

Winning Formula

GRAND PRIX MANAGER Puts You Behind The Desk Of Formula 1 Racing

by Gordon Goble



BLIMPY An eagle's eye view keys you in to all the raceday action; the control panel at the bottom of the screen allows you to dictate strategy and access data.

Yeah, sure, open-wheeled racing is about driving a very fast car at very fast speeds along winding ribbons of pavement. It's about deking and drafting and pushing machinery to the limit—keeping a cool head in some very hot circumstances. Still, as any enthusiast knows, the two or three hours of race day track time is a tiny fraction of the business, particularly in the elitist, cutting edge world of Formula 1.

Here, a competent driver can earn millions of dollars annually; teams may constitute hundreds of employees; budgets are often astronomical, and new technology must be ferociously guarded against enemy spies. The full spectrum of F1 racing, from boardroom to pit lane, has rarely been explored on the computer, and never like Spectrum HoloByte's GRAND PRIX MANAGER.

Qualifications? Let's just say that if you're a fan of both INDY CAR II *and* sports simulations like FRONT PAGE SPORTS FOOTBALL or STRAT-O-MATIC BASEBALL, this may be right up your alley. You'll deal with everything from bank loans to driver and personnel negotiations to sponsorship and merchandising deals. Everything, of course, still boils down to race day.

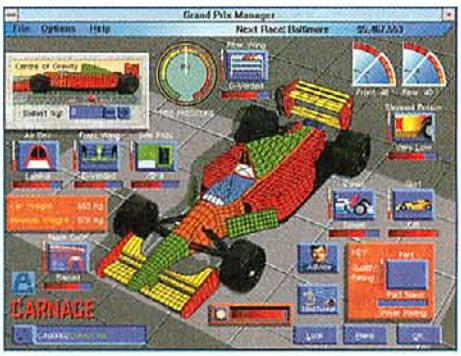
MAN WITH THREE HATS

At the track, you'll wear several hats: team manager, crew chief, mechanic and spiritual guide (well, almost). The only thing you won't do in this fascinating exercise is turn the wheel and squash the pedals. However, you will be advising Schumacher, Mansell, or whomever you've managed to sign, on their method of attack, when to pit, and when to let 'er rip.

A Windows-based (Windows 3.1 or Windows 95) program, most everything in GPM is icon driven and point-and-click friendly, with beautiful real-life photographs, colorful drawings and accurate schematics serving as backdrops. Unfortunately, this icon-driven interface can be a little confusing—at times there are over 10 different icons on the screen, each with their own set of sublevels.

Being a newcomer, I opted for the "rookie" level, where I could learn the ropes a little easier. I began at the top, selecting the powerful Williams team with race drivers Damon Hill and David Coulthard and test pilot J.C. Boullion. As usual, I skipped a bunch of steps and made a beeline for my first race. Not this time—I was immediately warned that I couldn't begin a season without a spare parts contract, a tire contract and a whole lot more. Like it or not, GRAND PRIX MANAGER requires that you take it seriously. It's a racing game for strategists.

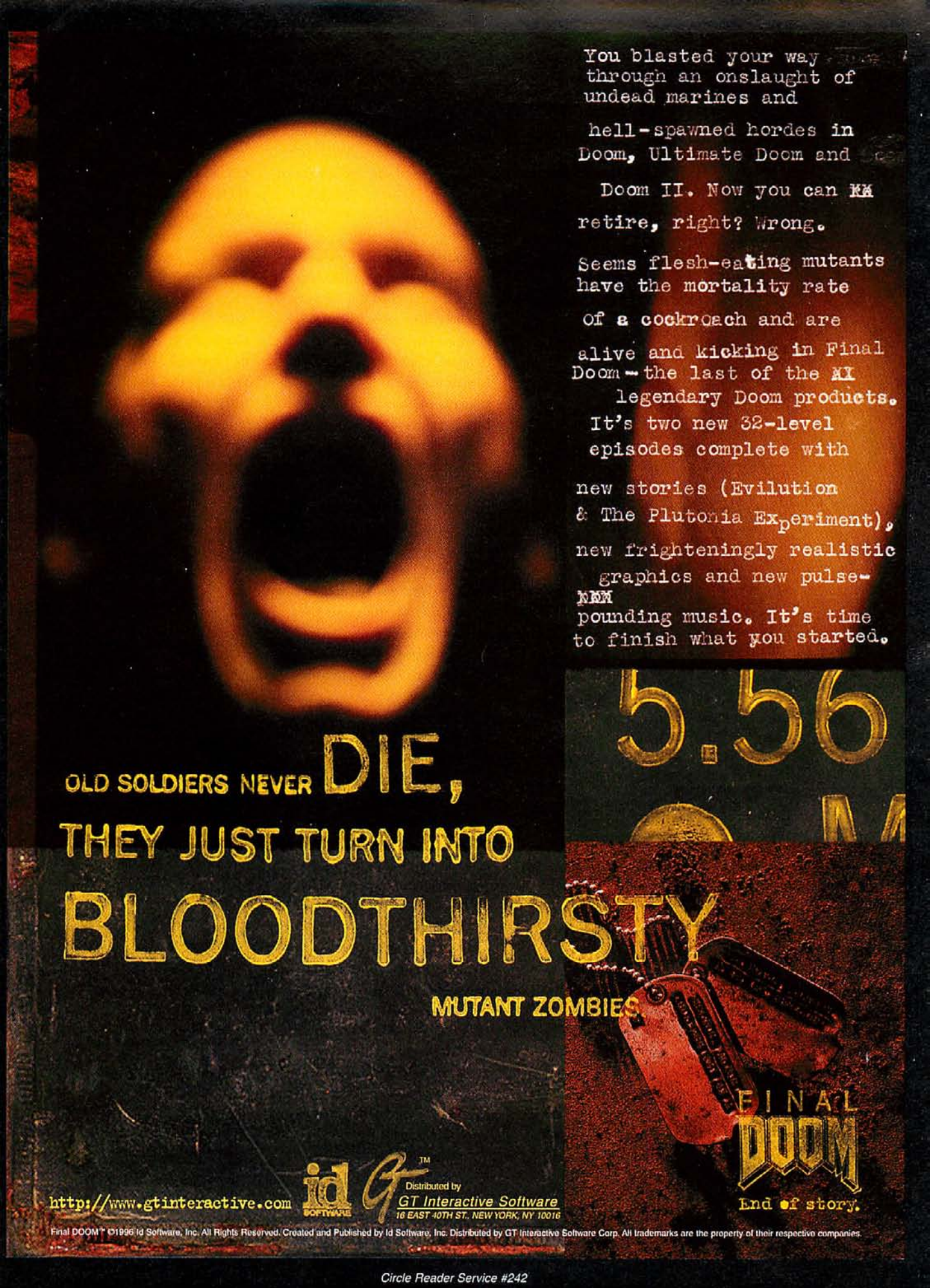
Digesting information as fast as I could, I scanned the manual and referred to the on-line help. Unfortunately, all I found were the basics, and I needed a lot more than that. GPM is a strategy game and can't be expected to give away too many "clues," but gamers will find themselves in need of much, much more than the manual's meager offering. For instance, what does a "D-vented" wing do that a "Vented" doesn't?



SETTING UP THE CARNAGE A detailed car setup screen allows Team Carnage to fine-tune their cars for the track.



Price: $59.95
System Requirements: IBM compatible 486 DX2-66 (Pentium recommended), 4 MB RAM (8 MB recommended), Windows 3.1 or Windows 95, 2x CD-ROM, 5 MB hard drive space, SVGA (640x480, 256 colors) graphics, mouse; supports Windows compatible sound cards
of Players: 1
Protection: None
Designer: Edward Grabowski
Publisher: Spectrum HoloByte
Alameda, CA
(510) 522-1164
Reader Service #: 335


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SERVICE PROVIDER GRAND PRIX MANAGER's pop-up windows let you check how your cars are doing during the race.

DOLLARS AND SENSE

Having chosen the Williams team, I had an extremely talented crew right from the start, but still had to contend with some personnel decisions like who to sign for next season, and whether Engineering needed a staff of 10 or 31.

With $10,000,000 burning a hole through my pockets, I was soon spending money fast and loose, and didn't stop until my bank balance hit $3,000,000. I saved a bit by going mid-grade in some areas, but for most categories, such as spare parts and fuel, it was nothing but the best. As my advisors said, why blow a race on a shoddy bolt?

This early in my career, only a few smaller concerns were interested in sponsorship, and they got very small representation for their very small dollars. I figure I'd reserve the prominent spots on the car's rear wing and driver's helmet for the big guys, who would surely bite after our stunning first race victory. I also spent a few more dollars on a team T-shirt, jacket and calendar to keep a high profile while on the sponsor hunt.

Then, it was on to R&D. A quick check of the FIA rule book told me that active suspension and ABS had been banned, so I devoted my engineers and mechanics to developing a pit-to-driver radio (early laps indicated that our driver communication was sorely lacking) and also started them working on an in-car camera. And I didn't completely ignore active suspension—it might be legalized next season.

RACER X

Much later (it can take some time to get things set up just right), the essence of my team had been set. Winning is never easy, but with my quality drivers and quality engine, I knew that at the least we'd be competitive. And most everyone, from financial manager to the twenty-fourth guy on the mechanical totem pole was happy—I checked and double-checked morale ratings to make sure of that.

I also had to fine-tune my car for the track. GRAND PRIX MANAGER doesn't offer much more in direct car setup than, say, INDYCAR RACING, but the right combination is an absolute must. Furthermore, parts do wear with time, something I dealt with later in the season in Aida (Japan) when one driver radioed me complaining about his worn tranny halfway through the race. Why the heck didn't my mechanics pick up on that *before* the race?

This illustrates one of the basic design flaws with GRAND PRIX MANAGER. Though it offers a management perspective, it requires too much hands-on and not enough management. You have to hire competent people, and then, do it yourself. For example, it is up to you to personally inspect every single piece of equipment and make every single financial decision *every step of the way*. From checking out your car before every race to making sure your primary sponsor is happy with your efforts on their behalf, it's all you. Make the wrong decision too many times in a row and write your career off. Period.

This high level of involvement occasionally makes the game more tedious than it should be. It would have been nice if GPM's different difficulty levels allowed you to delegate authority. For example, a sponsorship coordinator could take care of selling those overpriced car decals for you, and a head mechanic could ensure that your car was race ready. This way, gamers who don't want to deal with every little detail don't have to.

CHECKERED FLAG

GRAND PRIX MANAGER runs flawlessly in Windows 3.1, although constant "Alt-Tabbing" can cause lock-ups. Audio consists mostly of generic yet realistic car and track sounds that have nothing to do with where the cars are on the track. Sadly, radio transmissions are seen, not heard. Graphically, the entire race is run from the blimp view with occasional generic 3-D flic sequences to indicate that your driver has entered the pits. Since televised racing coverage depends so heavily on different views, only the most tunnel-visioned race fan will be satisfied with the ants crawling around the track. Even the pay-off for winning lacks clan. For example, when I did scrape together a superstellar, one-two Team Carnage finish, the newspaper headlines unceremoniously read "Schumacher Unlucky," with no attention paid to my team's stellar performance. Grrr...

I'm a guy who relishes "hands-on" racing products, where Driving The Machine takes absolute precedence. Yet, much to my surprise, GRAND PRIX MANAGER is where I'm going these days for my racing fix, despite sometimes being told that a driver's fastest lap was his first one—an impossibility. This comprehensive racing game is fresh and bold. Too bad it isn't enough of a complete package to interest more than diehards like me.

Racing Report

You may not be able to drive in GRAND PRIX RACING, but you have plenty of control over the action on raceday. Most of the screen is devoted to an overhead "blimp" view of the track. Along the bottom of the screen is a complex control panel (you'll eventually get the hang of it, where you can monitor current lap times to the hundredth of a second via an inset window, remaining tank load vs. laps, tire wear, telemetry (speed vs. distance) and climatic conditions.

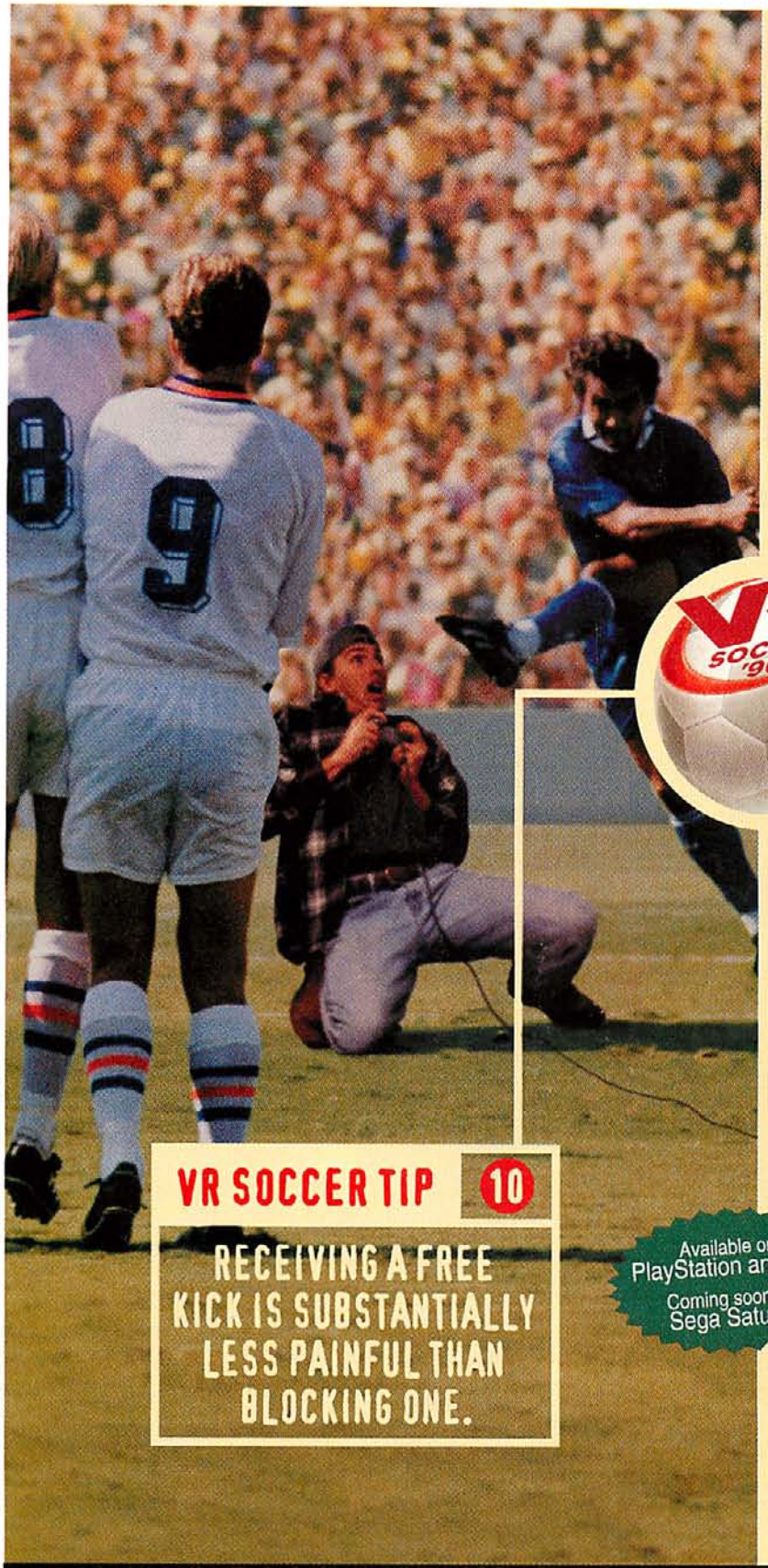
With a convenient slider control, you can order your drivers to ease off, drive harder, watch their fuel or tires, block cars, or head for the pits on a moment's notice. You can even fast-forward through the race and get beautiful in-close animations on virtually any on-track incident you want.

APPEAL: Anyone with a passing interest in racing (or a severe lack of coordination), or fans of sports management should enjoy GRAND PRIX MANAGER. If you're looking for behind-the-wheel action, you won't find it here.

PROS: Allows you to take control of a Formula 1 team from start to finish, designing cars, selling sponsorships and directing raceday strategy.

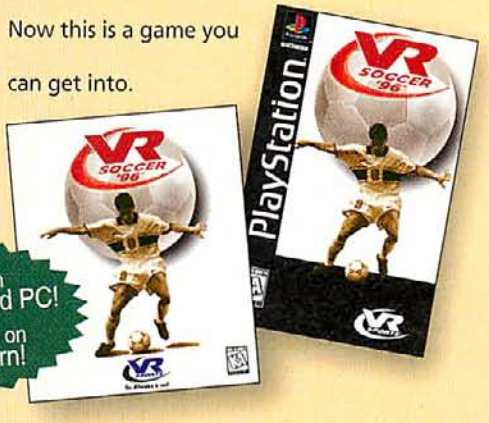
CONS: Makes you oversee every detail of your racing team at all times; inadequate manual; and ant-size blimp-view depictions of race.

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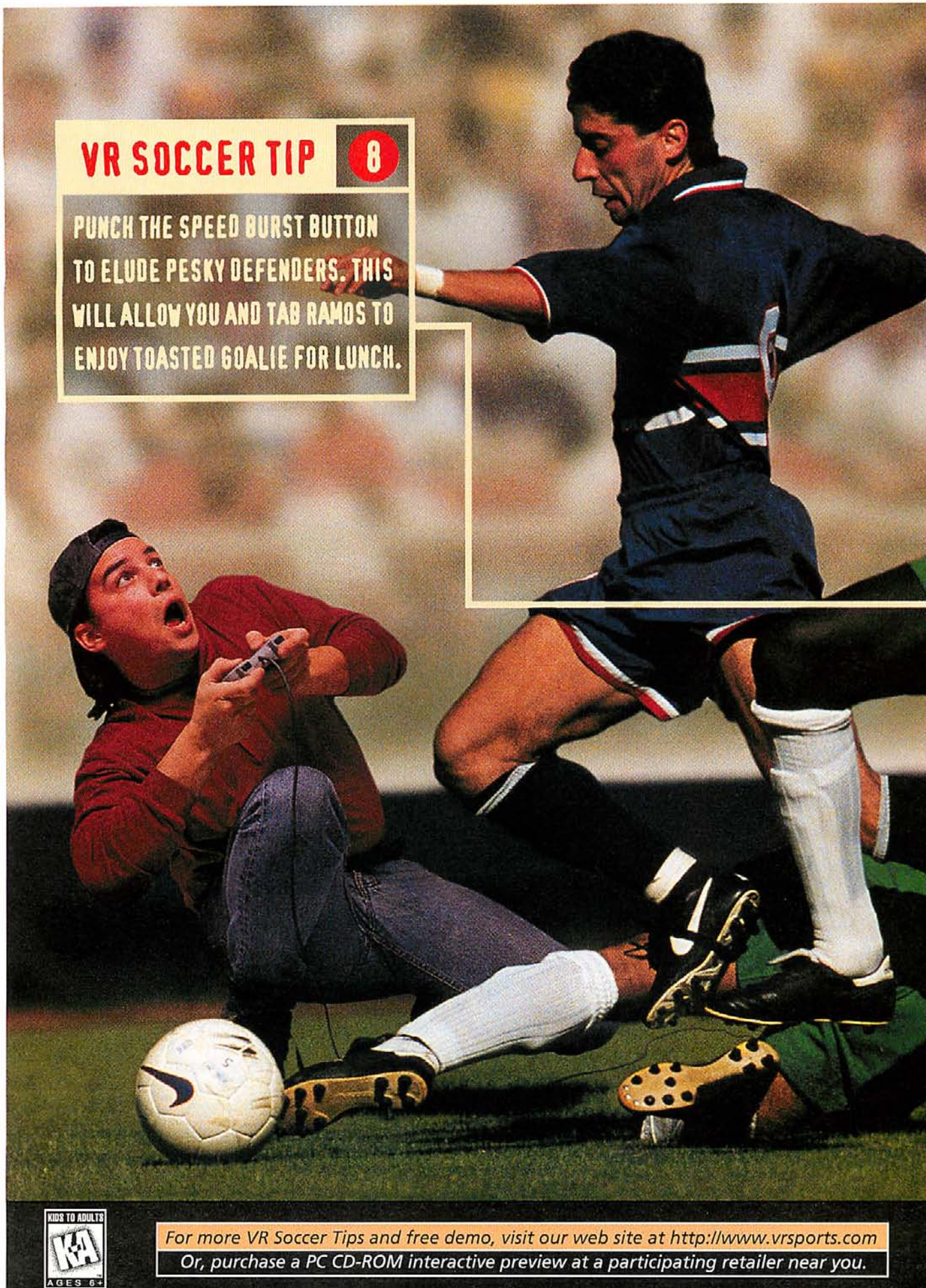
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PlayStation

CD ROM DOS VERSION

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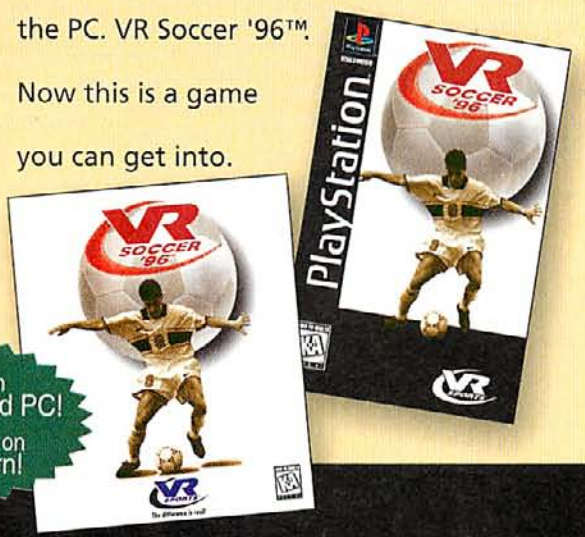
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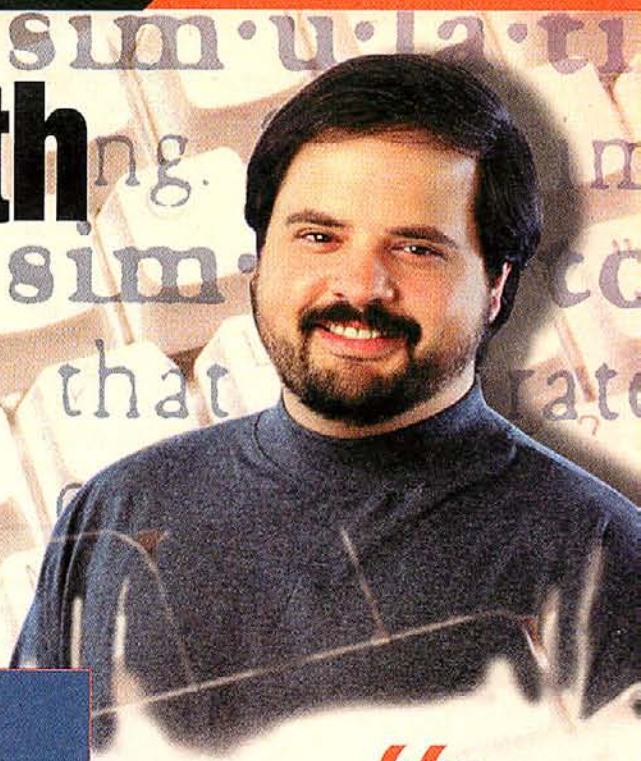


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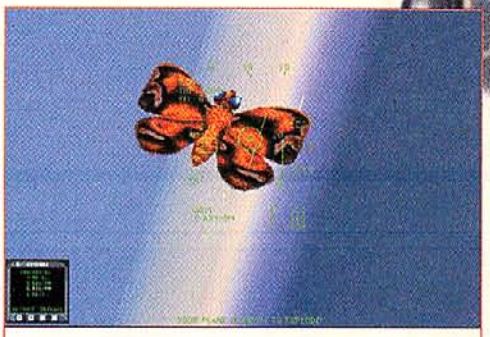
Circle Reader Service #207

Atomic Moth Invades Pacific!

Kurile Islands Invaded By Giant Bug! Marine Fighters Respond With Force!



Reports in from the Kurile Islands indicate that the Japanese/Russian battle over possession of the disputed islands has ground to a halt after the appearance of a giant radioactive insect over the Russian battle group. At first the reports were written off as a publicity stunt for the latest Godzilla movie. However, the Russian InterFax news agency yesterday released video of three Su-27 Flanker fighters engaged in combat against what appeared to be a huge bug. One jet was destroyed when a sort of glowing fireball was emitted from the head of the insect.



BUG OUT! Seen from the cockpit of an American Giant Moth, a Russian Giant Moth is about to meet the Great Light Bulb of Death.

This morning a team of Japanese scientists traveled to the uncharted island where the insect engaged the Russian aircraft and observed the insect in flight. They report that it is a giant moth, 200 feet long and with a wingspan of over 150 feet. The scientists postulate that the moth is the result of some sort of post-atomic mutation, likely the result of nuclear weapons testing in the area. The fireballs it uses for defense are actually globes of radioactive energy. While hostilities continue in the area, an American Marine strike force has been sent in to destroy the moth and return its body for scientific examination.

"For once, I'm happy to see bugs in a flight simulator."

SIM-PLY WEIRD

No, that's not a clip from the *Weekly World News*, it's the latest and greatest in flight sim experiences. Best of all, you may already have this man-versus-bug scenario sitting on your shelf. The giant moth has been hiding in your copy of MARINE FIGHTERS or U.S. NAVY FIGHTERS GOLD. It's yet another Easter Egg, those surprises that programmers hide in games for their own—and your—amusement.

You actually can see the moth in the first Kurile mission without knowing any secret codes. After you finish the mission objectives, fly to the northwest corner of the campaign map. Eventually you'll find a mysterious island that doesn't appear on the game's map. Close in and you'll spot the Atomic Moth orbiting the island.

If you decide to engage the moth, be

ON THE RADAR

Interactive Creations, Inc. is still working hard to bring all the promised features to its WARBIRDS World War II simulation. The surprise January appearance of a 32-bit Windows 95 version that works over SLIP/PPP connections was a happy indication that ICI's developers are still hard at work. Once they get WARBIRDS wrapped up, they plan to turn their sights to a space simulation. Details haven't been worked out yet, but look for ICI's dedication to realism to work its way into this second online sim as well. Real motion physics in a space sim will make for some interesting combat tactics, such as thrusting up to speed, then turning around and shooting the guy on your tail. This will be more than a shoot-em-up, though, with economic and other factors coming into play. Don't look for it, though, until WARBIRDS is fully fleshed-out.

sure to keep your speed up. The radioactive moth balls are deadly to your plane, but they travel very slowly. Keep a high rate of speed, and maneuver when the balls approach to avoid contact.

BUGGING OUT

The moth isn't just a potential opponent, though. You can also take it for a test flight by holding down the right Ctrl, Alt, and Shift keys when clicking the Vehicle Info button. Check out the specs, then take it for a buzz. Notice that the Atomic Moth is, of course, a VTOL bug, so you can use vectored thrust to enhance its turning capabilities and keep near corner velocity.

To use Atomic Moths as friendly or aggressor aircraft in the Quick Mission module, hold down the right Ctrl, Alt, and Shift keys as you press any Plane Type button. Keep these keys pressed as you click OK to select the Moth, and again when you press Okay to start the mission.

You can also take the Atomic Moth up on Single Missions. Just hold down the above-listed keys as you click on OK to exit the map screen and proceed to the Select Plane screen. Keep the keys pressed until the next screen appears, and you'll find an Atomic Moth sitting on the carrier. Finally, you can add the Atomic Moth to Pro Missions by holding down right Ctrl, Alt, and Shift while choosing Add from the Object menu.

ON WINGS OF INSECTS

For once, I'm happy to see bugs in a flight simulator. The Atomic Moth is actually a versatile craft to take on certain missions. Although it's subsonic, its organic construction and lack of standard propulsion give it very low infra-red and radar signatures. The moth balls are good for attacking ground targets and slow-moving planes. Although they're very slow, they track targets well, turn quickly, and do huge amounts of damage.

I'd like to thank EA's Brent Iverson, MARINE FIGHTERS' designer and programmer, for letting's CG's readers in on this bug bonus.

CG TIPS!

▸ To fly any plane shown on MARINE FIGHTERS' Vehicle Info screen, hold down the right Ctrl, Alt, and Shift keys and click on the Fly button. Even if it's currently dimmed, you'll be able to fly that plane. *—Brent Iverson, Electronic Arts*

▸ To fly any campaign mission in MARINE FIGHTERS, hold down the right Ctrl, Alt, and Shift keys when you clock on Single Mission on the Choose Activity screen. Keep the keys pressed until the next screen appears. You'll see a number of mysterious mission names at the top of the list that begin with a dollar sign. Do *not* click on any of these, or the game will crash! They are mission fragments used by the Quick Mission screen, and are not complete mission files. *—Brent Iverson, EA*

If you have tips or cheats you'd like to share with other sim fans, email them to datkin@zd.com.



Circle Reader Service #121

YOUR LUCK IS ABOUT TO RUN OUT



You are the last Ranaxian rebel, and the only hope to save your planet from certain doom. But that makes you the most wanted guy around, and your only chance for survival is to run. Experience non-stop action as you battle an onslaught of deadly aliens. Pump out a round of fireballs and take out three of the ugliest creatures you've ever seen. Then run for your life, because there are two more uglies heading your way. Lock on with laser targeting and blow them off the face of the planet with a devastating sonic blast! Rebel Runner-Operation: Digital Code combines the greatest elements of an arcade-style action game with simulated 3D environments that make you feel like you're caught in the middle of a deadly extraterrestrial war. You've been lucky so far in your mission, but you never know when your luck may run out!









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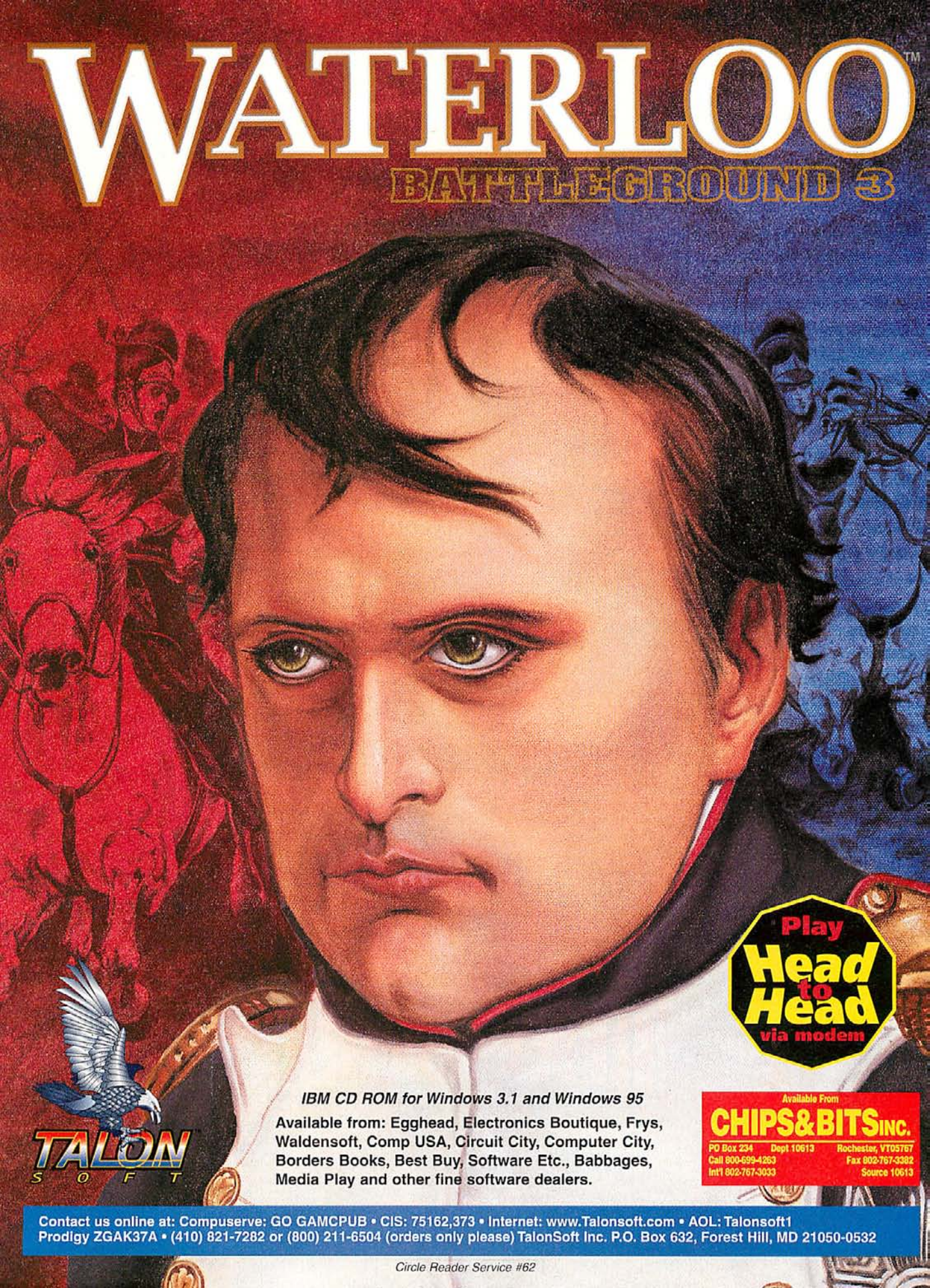
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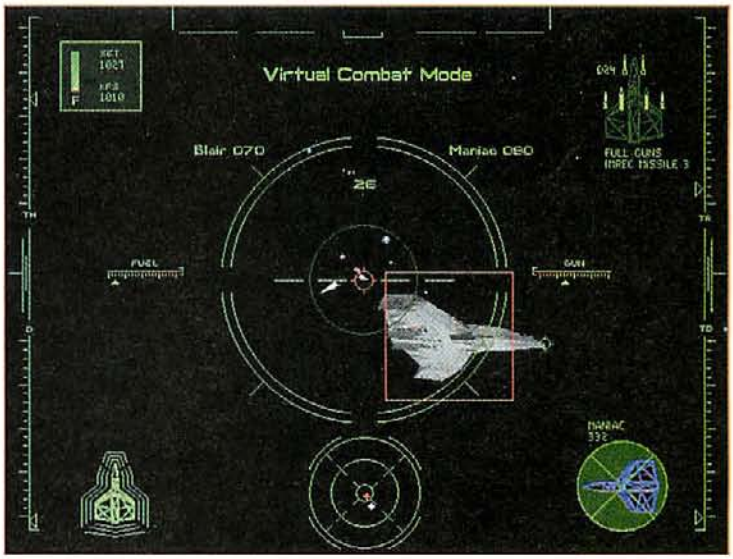
Freedom Rings True

Origin Packs In The Popcorn Without Leaving Out The Game

by Scott A. May

Forget everything you know about interactive movies. With the release of WING COMMANDER IV: THE PRICE OF FREEDOM, designer Chris Roberts and his team at Origin blow this upstart game genre wide open by creating an interactive movie that excels as a movie *and* a game.

The look and feel of Roberts' creation has changed dramatically since the series' auspicious debut in 1990. The original WING COMMANDER, though still an engaging piece of computer entertainment, seems little more than an ambitious space cartoon by today's standards. Each subsequent release—WING COMMANDER: THE SECRET MISSIONS, WING COMMANDER ARMADA, and WING COMMANDER II: VENGEANCE OF THE KILRATHI—saw subtle improvements in graphic quality, artificial intelligence, story detail and character development. In 1994, WING COMMANDER III: THE HEART OF THE TIGER, introduced live-action video and full-blown Hollywood production values. Once again, Roberts pushed the envelope of electronic entertainment.



MANIAC ATTACK The game starts with an opportunity to prove your flying mettle against Maniac.



Price: $59.95 (street)
System Requirements: IBM compatible 486 DX4-75 or better (Pentium 75 recommended), 8MB RAM, DOS 5.0 or higher, 30 MB hard drive space, SVGA, 2x CD-ROM (4x recommended), mouse or joystick; supports Sound Blaster compatible sound cards.
of Players: 1
Protection: None
Designer: Chris Roberts
Publisher: Origin Systems
Austin, TX
(512) 335-5200
Reader Service #: 336



WHATS YOUR BIFF? Tom Wilson reprises his role as the insufferable Maniac.

As good as the previous installment was, it served as only a rough prototype for the polished chrome that adorns WING COMMANDER IV. Real sets, improved film quality, digital Dolby Surround sound, imaginative camera work and more relaxed, expressive acting all work together to create a ground-breaking cinematic experience. Beneath the surface, the game's storyline has also significantly matured, targeting a more adult audience with greater attention paid to plausible plot turns and character depth.

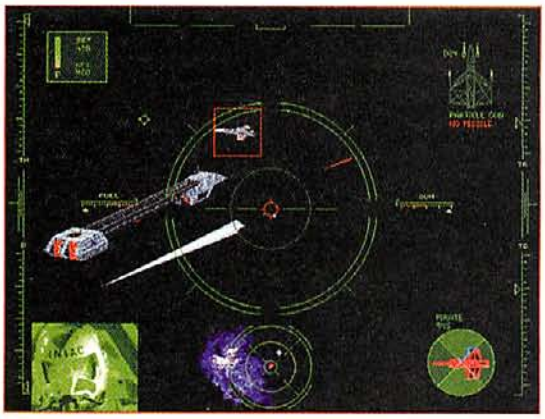
By the same token, traditional gaming values remain alive and kicking. Interactive elements have been streamlined in some cases and expanded in others. The end result is a near-perfect integration of film and computer entertainment that should set this burgeoning industry back on its collective heels.

GOODBYE, KITTIES

In the last episode, the humans of the Terran Confederation barely survived an all-out war with their dreaded antagonists, the cat-like Kilrathi, thanks to your heroic efforts as spacefighter pilot Col. Christopher Blair (played by Mark Hamill). Now that the war is finally over, Blair has planted himself on *terra firma* to enjoy the peaceful life of a farmer. But all is not well in the galaxy you fought so hard to defend. The economy is sluggish, no longer fueled by the war machine. Far worse, renegade attacks on Confed ships—many of them unarmed civilian transports—suggest rebel activity in the Border Worlds. Could this be the start of a civil war?

Admiral Tolwyn (Malcolm McDowell), commander of the Strategic Readiness Agency, thinks so. As the story begins, he addresses members of the Terran Assembly, urging the use of full military action to quash the rebels. He dispatches your old friend and irritant, Maniac (Tom Wilson), to return you to active duty. "I've always said, you're either an eagle or an earthworm," Maniac taunts. To no one's surprise, Blair jumps at the opportunity to see action again.

Once reinstated, Blair dutifully follows Tolwyn's lead. Then like clockwork, a series of conflicting orders, mysterious discoveries and suspicious personnel shifts begin to raise doubts about the entire affair. Are the Border World conflicts simply a ruse? Are there traitors at work within the Confederation and—if so—how high up does the conspiracy go? Even more disturbing, you're no longer completely sure who you can trust.



JUST SHUT UP, OK? One of the most irritating WING III features returns—in combat, pilots repeat the same annoying taunts over and over.

We wouldn't want to spoil things by outlining every plot twist and character action. Suffice it to say that this script has some whoppers, delivered in a more convincing manner than previous efforts in the series. Although the ending isn't exactly a shocker, how you arrive there is an intricate and entertaining web of disparate plot threads, untangled by your decisions and actions throughout the game.

ACTION AND INTERACTION

Structurally, the game is divided into a series of 15 scenarios, each of which can branch into a number of player-controlled directions. Your performance in battle, as well as your choices in dozens of key character interactions, determine which limb of the multi-branching storyline you follow. Some of the game's most intriguing plot branches are built right into the cinematic cut scenes. The film pauses, prompting you to choose between two character responses. Sometimes the effect is immediate and dramatic; other times it foreshadows actions—or inactions—much later in the game. Decisions affecting morale now influence individual characters only, not the entire ship. A welcome addition is a conversation map, which allows you to view which characters are available for optional or mandatory interaction—you'll spend a lot less time wandering the halls of the ship.

With the basic technology in place from WING III, the producers were able to spend more time on storyboarding and mission design, resulting in consistently smoother game flow. Flight duties no longer involve simple blast fests; you'll be sent on rescue, reconnaissance, infiltration and planetside missions. Another big change: cockpits have virtually disappeared from your spacefighters, replaced with elaborate HUDs projecting more than 17 different instruments, gauges and tactical information onto the viewscreen. Though visually less enticing than the traditional first-person bitmapped display, it's more functional, giving pilots the bigger picture—targeting radar, power consumption, ordnance supply, damage control—at a glance. New ships available for combat include the Black Lance Dragon, armed with an incredible fission cannon, and the Banshee, equipped with the new wide-burst scatter gun. Several ships support "autoslide," a real-world physics tactical maneuver which allows you to fly in one direction and shoot in another—perfect for strafing runs on capital ships. Some items left out of WING III make a triumphant return here, such as tractor beams and an improved version of the Mace missile. Six skill levels, ranging from rookie to nightmare, affect flying and gunnery skills of both enemy and allied pilots.



DEADLY EFFECTS Special effects in the game's video sequences are top-notch, easily matching those of *Babylon 5* or *Space: Above and Beyond*

WINGMAN COMMANDER

Wingmen play an even greater role in this new adventure. You can now choose wingmen from the entire duty roster, bringing into play pilot attributes such as trigger-happiness, aggressiveness, courage, flying skill, loyalty and verbosity. Some missions even require the use of a second team of wingmen. These can be ordered to different quadrants, reporting their status directly back to you. Chatter among wingmen has been significantly expanded with each response indicative of their current morale level. Unfortunately, however, the responses are still annoyingly repetitive, at times building the desire to shoot your own wingman just to shut him or her up.

One of the most interesting aspects of



BAR TALK The new conversation map lets you go straight to where the discussion action is—no more wandering the halls.

the new game is the uncertainty of your opponents. There's no clear-cut enemy like the Kilrathi. Instead, the enemy rises from within. You never know if the wingman who backs you up on one mission will be flying against you somewhere down the line. It brings a refreshing sense of mystery to an already complex game structure.

PERFORMANCE ANXIETY

Production designer Chris Douglas has tweaked the graphics considerably, both in the cinematic cut scenes and actual space combat. Although the programmers utilize the same 3-D animation package (*Alias*) as in WING III, the graphics are now rendered in 24-bit true color, producing greater detail and smoother texture maps. The most spectacular example of the improved graphics engine can be seen in the numerous special effects, including a mind-blowing shock wave (triggered by the special Flash-Pak bomb) that rivals anything seen in a sci-fi feature film. Add in light-source shading and 16-bit Dolby Surround digital stereo and you have a game with breathtaking overall ambiance.

To get the most from the game, you'll need an above-average 486 local-bus system and quad-speed CD-ROM drive. Although the product tested reasonably well on a lesser machine (486DX2-66 non-local bus), the animation proved too fractured for serious extended play. On a mid-range Pentium or 486DX4-120 with PCI bus, the game flows like a mountain stream.

Many products claim to be interactive movies, but fall short in either their cinematic or long-term gaming appeal. WING COMMANDER IV addresses every aspect of this new genre with equal importance. This truly is the vanguard of the next generation of electronic entertainment.

Is It Time To Take Interactive Movies Seriously?

Like it or not, Hollywood has invaded the computer gaming industry. Although much has already been said—both pro and con—about this creative merger, so far the results have proven so inconsistent and inadequate that neither critics nor gamers have taken the hybrid genre seriously.

Until now. WING COMMANDER IV ushers in a new era of electronic entertainment, where acting, scripting, direction and production values are treated equally with traditional game elements in the overall quality of design. None of the elements has received short shrift.

The time has come to rethink our approach to multimedia gaming, whether you're a producer, critic or end user. As Hollywood's influence seeps deeper into game design, we must begin to apply the same critical observations to games as we would with film. Does the addition of live-action video integrate seamlessly with the interactive experience? Or is it merely superfluous eye candy, tossed in as an afterthought? If we are to seriously accept the cinematic aspects of a game, we must then view the total package in a whole new light, where film technique plays as significant a role as interactive strategy and action.

As noted, previous efforts in cinematic gaming have been little more than interesting experiments. Some are solid games, sprinkled with enough video sequences to qualify them as multimedia products. Others are full-blown movie productions that lose sight of intrinsic gaming values. Both game styles suffer from similar shortcomings: bad acting, dull scripts and amateurish production. With few exceptions, this highly touted union of Hollywood and Silicon Valley has produced dysfunctional offspring. It's clear that neither side fully understands the needs of the other.

WING COMMANDER IV represents the best example yet of a cinematic game that blends equal parts of two disparate professions into a single cohesive package. From the opening credits, carefully assimilated into an absolutely awesome 15-minute introduction, it's clear that designer Chris Roberts has learned much since WING COMMANDER III, his first foray into Hollywood-style production. Roberts' direction is masterful and assured, two qualities that are immediately evident on the screen. Camera angles are bold, but not conspicuous; the editing is crisp and dynamic; and transitions between scenes are incredibly smooth and imaginative. Even the use of background music and sound effects are tasteful and ambient, augmenting—but not distracting from—the unfolding storyline.

The acting is much more relaxed and professional this time out. Lead actors Mark Hamill, Malcolm McDowell, Tom Wilson, Jason Bernard and John Rhys-Davies all exhibit greater confidence in the roles they apply to this new medium. One can only suspect that their performances in the previous game were marred by uncertainty and awkwardness, acting principally before green-screen imaginary backdrops. This time out, post-production magic plays a lesser role, thus putting the actors more at ease. More than 35 full-sized sets were built for the game, with all live action shot on standard 35mm film. No longer do the actors look like cardboard cutouts projected against computerized sets. The scale and quality of the production lends greater freedom for both the actors and director to explore dramatic cinematic techniques.

As in film, professional acting and high production values mean little without a solid script. Returning screenwriters Terry Borst and Frank De Palma deliver the goods. The main storyline is engaging from the beginning, and it grows more intriguing as the plot branches, based on player input and performance. Key character confrontations are lively and informative, with plenty of playful banter thrown in to keep the game from taking itself too seriously. Although there's slightly less interaction with minor characters throughout the game, the dialogue that ensues gives much more insight to the total gaming experience. Because the camera is more mobile, there are fewer static scenes than the previous adventure. Perhaps a reflection of better production values and overall confidence of the crew, the script exudes a harder, raucous edge than before. Rated "M" for mature audiences, the script is peppered with liberal amounts of realistic violence and adult language.

Other aspects of the film production that merit kudos include everything from lighting, costumes, extras and foley artists. A special nod goes to cinematographer Eric Goldstein, a 21-year Hollywood veteran, whose credits include such feature films as *Arachnophobia*, *The Grifters* and *The Addams Family*. Together with Roberts, the pair skillfully incorporate techniques such as pans, dissolves, wipes, cross-cutting and tracking shots into the final print.

Some will continue to mock the concept of "Siliwood," but the marriage of Hollywood and Silicon Valley is definitely real and here to stay. In this regard, no current game charts a more optimistic path to the future of multimedia entertainment than WING COMMANDER IV. —*Scott A. May*

TARGET AUDIENCE: Both new and experienced fans of this venerable sci-fi space-combat series. Curious about so-called interactive movies? This is one of the few that works, and it works well.

PROS: A near-perfect meld of professional cinematics, branching storylines and heart-pounding space action. First-rate production values, from the quality cast to the stunning SVGA graphics and clean stereo sound.

CONS: Annoying, repetitive wingman dialogue may make you want to commit fratricide. Similarity of some missions detracts from ongoing story development. Hefty system requirements make for smooth gameplay on only the fastest systems.

CG RATED

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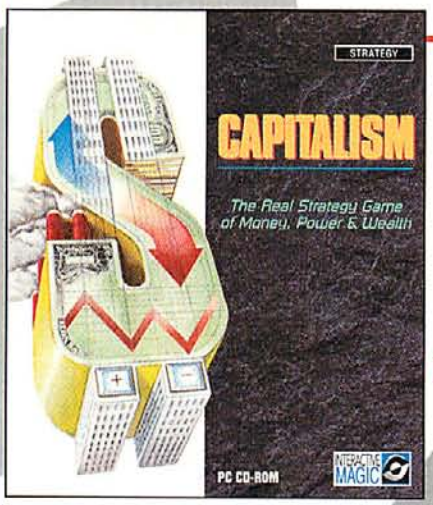
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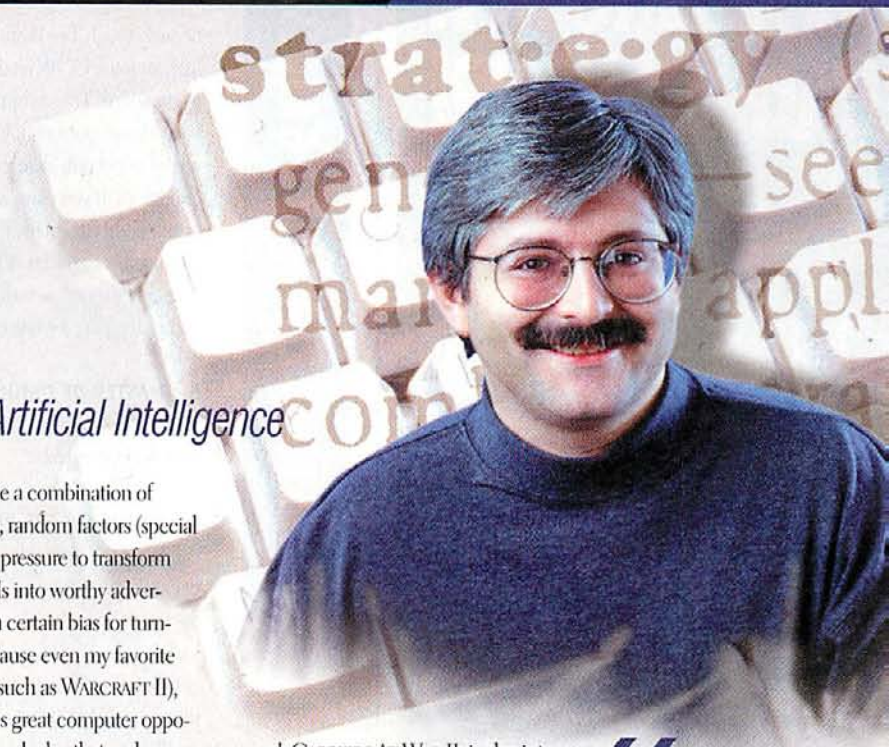
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Circle Reader Service #129

Silicon General

Opponents Are More Than Just Artificial Intelligence



Gamers invariably ask: "what games have the best AI?" What they *really* want to know is which games will give them the best fight for their hard-earned gaming dollars. Good gamers will eventually beat even the strongest Artificial Intelligence, once they figure out the chinks in their silicon opponent's armor. Face it—with all the wonderful advances in graphics, interfaces and the like, about the only improvement in real AI has come from increased processor speed, allowing the computer to calculate positions more quickly (and make a move before you fall asleep).

Lest you toss your ivory-handled virtual pistols through the monitor in despair, let me quickly add that it *is* possible to have a good computer *opponent*. STEEL PANTHERS, for example, has a merely decent AI. But the computer is optimized to utilize combined arms tactics and to aggressively exploit weapons advantages; so, you can get a good game by giving your silicon opponent Tiger tanks. The best wargames use a combination of clever campaigns, random factors (special events), and time pressure to transform even mediocre AIs into worthy adversaries. I admit to a certain bias for turn-based games, because even my favorite real-time games (such as WARCRAFT II), can't be held up as great computer opponents; it's the network play that makes those games. The following selections comprise my elite corps of tough strategy games—battles I never tire of.

10 BATTLES OF NAPOLEON (SSI)

Those that seek true wargaming wisdom need only look past the EGA graphics to know that BoN does Bonaparte proud. The computer does a good job of deploying artillery, and its cavalry charges are impressive, especially considering the age of the design. It's still available, and the extra scenarios from Novastar games are inexpensive and well worth a look.

9 CARRIERS AT WAR (SSG)

The first computer wargame to randomly select victory objectives for the computer each time you played, based on historical probabilities. The computer was better at operational surprise than tactical finesse, but beware the human admiral who got caught with planes on deck. The sequel, CARRIERS AT WAR II, is also interesting, with a great hypothetical 1936 scenario.

8 GENGHIS KHAN II (KOEI)

Welcome to Ancient Combined Arms Tactics 101, where you learn to deploy such varied units as Samurai, Nomads, Elephants, Catapults, Knights and even medieval Artillery. Sure, it's abstract, but it's also great fun, and the computer opponents are aggressive and eager to exploit perceived weaknesses in human generals. On my laptop, Kublai Khan is still razing the countryside.

> "Faster number-crunching AI, by itself, just doesn't cut it against veteran human generals."

7 ALLIED GENERAL (SSI)

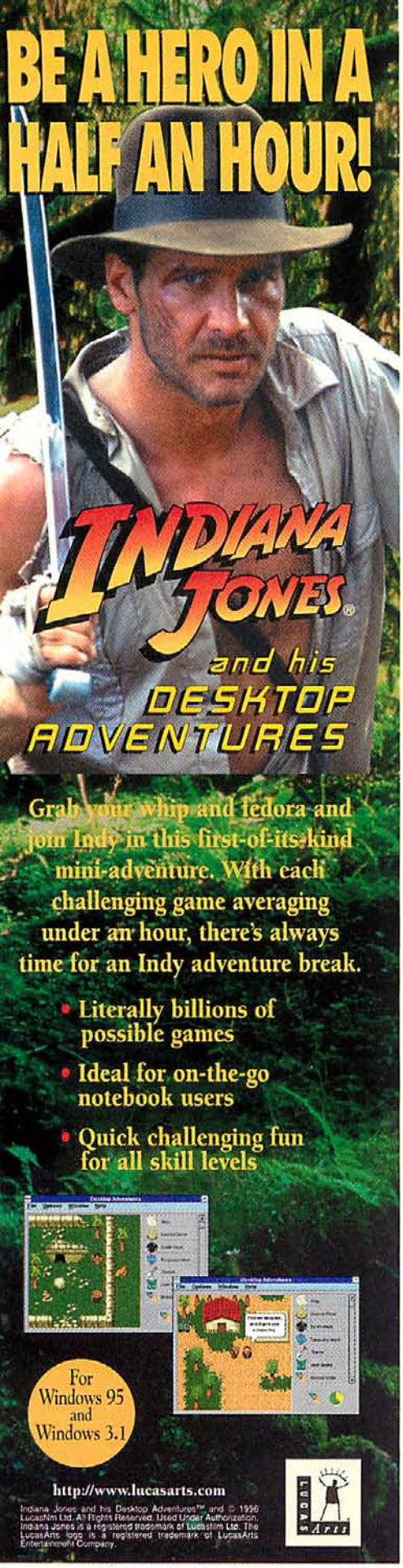
In terms of sheer AI, this really should be higher on the list. But even though it's great fun, the game could have used some more of that old SSI play-balance and scenario tweaking. Still, the Russians, British and US forces are different enough that they require you to master a variety of playing styles to achieve ultimate victory over the Germans. One of the few native-mode Win 95 games so far worth buying.

6 WARLORDS II (SSG)

Ever since the BATTLEFRONT days, SSG has offered consistently strong computer opponents. The original wasn't par-

BRIEFINGS

- The best wargame collection I've ever seen is TWENTY WARGAME CLASSICS, now available from SSI. PANZER GENERAL, CLASH OF STEEL, BATTLES OF NAPOLEON, WARLORDS and PACIFIC WAR are the cream of the more than two dozen games included from SSI, SSG and Impressions.
- Impressions' classic LORDS OF THE REALM is being upgraded: better graphics, more diplomatic options, more ways to reap big harvests and keep cows happy. Expect the sequel by this fall.



Circle Reader Service #117

TERRY COLEMAN

ticularly tough, but WARLORDS II is still high atop the CGW reader's poll due to its sneaky AI. The computer opponents have a good grasp of how geography relates to not only defense, but to victory conditions. If you play "straight" without razing every city on the map to the ground, this is still a very good challenge. The only major flaw is that it takes the computer quite a while to move.

5 MASTER OF ORION (SIMTEX)

Check out the comments under this month's Hall of Fame.

4 TIGERS ON THE PROWL (HPS)

One of the most intimidating computer games ever designed, TIGERS pays back with enough realism to make the learning curve worthwhile. If you want a computer opponent which seems to understand WWII tactical armored and small-arms combat, you've come to the right place.

3 FLIGHT COMMANDER 2 (AH)

This overlooked, realistic flight combat game has nary a joystick in sight! All the military aircraft you could want from Korea, Vietnam and modern conflicts are pitted against each other in a tense strategy-based game. If it lacks the visceral thrill of the traditional flight sim, it also has the advantage of being able to pilot a complete squadron at once. The computer pilots are tenacious, and when you tire of the original battles, the add-on scenario pack and editor keep the unfriendly skies challenging for years of sorties.

2 ACES OF THE DEEP (SIERRA) RED STORM RISING (MICROPROSE)

Technically, these are simulations. Regardless of classification, both are memorable for their tough campaigns (RED STORM's NATO/Warsaw Pact version of WWIII never happened). Incurably cocky skippers need only try a tryst with a Soviet hunter-killer sub under the Arctic Ice Cap at Ultimate level for an immediate attitude adjustment. The convoy AI of ACES does a remarkable job (on the highest levels) of chasing your sub to the ocean's bottom with deadly patterns of depth charges. The compromises in both designs made for playability's sake leave more than enough realism to make you believe that you really are a sub commander. Watch out for those dud torpedoes!

1 PANZER GENERAL (SSI)

This is without a doubt the best wargame ever designed for the computer. It may not have the best AI of any wargame, and it certainly isn't the most realistic, nor even the grandest in scope (PACIFIC WAR still holds that distinction). What PG does have is an uncanny ability to push all of a gamer's buttons: a great concept (being the next Rommel or Guderian); well-balanced and challenging scenarios (I defy anyone to tell me that Norway, Moscow or France was a cakewalk); and an aggressive computer opponent based on the playing styles of the designers. The constant time pressure—having to meet the increasing demands of the High Command in a limited number of turns—gives PG a sense of urgency which even the best real-time strategy/wargames lack. It hardly surprises me that PG is still on our readers' most-played list—I have well over 500 hours invested in the game myself.

Terry Coleman's opinions occasionally coincide with those of other CGW editors. Feel free to contact him concerning strategy, wargaming and other gaming topics at tcoleman@zd.com.

CG TIPS!

ALLIED GENERAL: US and British tanks usually have either good offense or defense ratings, but rarely both. This can cause problems for aggressive generals, who find their Sherman Fireflies torched by counterpunching German units. The solution is a three-step attack: 1) blast away with the big-gunned but thin-skinned tanks; 2) move a tank destroyer between the tank and surviving Germans; 3) move a self-propelled artillery unit to a hex which covers both. As usual, combined arms will be vastly more effective than individual units on their own.—*Tim Carter*

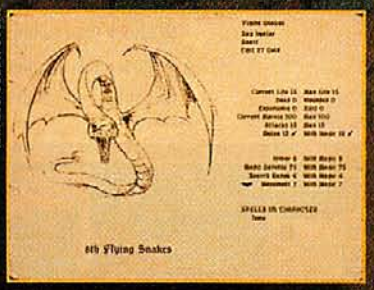
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Paradise Bossed

AFTERLIFE Deifies You For The Ultimate Managerial Role

by Dr. Johnny L. Wilson

SNEAK PREVIEW
GAME STILL IN DEVELOPMENT

"If God is all-powerful," goes the logical fallacy, "can he/she/it create a rock too heavy to lift?" Of course, this is the fallacy known as "contradictory premises," since the "if" clause is directly antithetical to the real question. While playing a demo version of LucasArts' upcoming AFTERLIFE, I finally found the answer. Apparently, it *is* possible for the deity to do so, since the astral planes of heaven and hell *both* contain rocks too heavy to lift.

Such is the beauty of AFTERLIFE. It uses a rubric of theological systems and issues to create a SIMCITY-style strategy game that is both challenging and entertaining (on a number of levels). Don't be afraid of religious propaganda, though. No matter whether you lean toward religion, philosophy, mythology or theosophy, you'll have to check your belief system at the door. AFTERLIFE is a harlequin's suit of cosmic metaphor—both fun and funny.



CRIME AND PUNISHMENT Once zoned for vices or virtues, punishment and reward structures appear on the heavenly or infernal plane.

SOUL MAN

You begin as a demiurge in charge of both heaven and hell. As such, you pretty well have the same types of power as the mayor of SIMCITY. You have a budget, calculated by a soul tax in which you receive a cosmic monetary unit (literally, pennies from heaven) per SOUL (Stuff Of Unending Life), and you have two advisors (Aria and Jasper) who look like Japanime characters, but offer sound advice for managing the eternal dimensions. Using these assets, you must zone both heaven and hell in such a way as to accomodate the EMBOs (Ethically Mature Biological Organisms) consigned there in the most efficient way. In short, you get to play God to a race of alien beings.



INFERNAL DEVELOPMENT Since zones need proximity to roads in order to flourish, infernal (and eternal) planners will want to maximize their potential with narrow strips such as these for each vice or virtue.

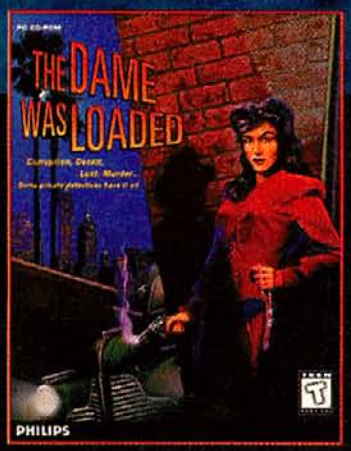
Rather than merely zoning the eternal dimensions in SIMCITY style (as residential, commercial and industrial), however, you zone various astral territories to accomodate souls according to the deadly sins they've committed or the gracious virtues they've developed. There is even a generic zone, balanced between the vices and virtues, for those who don't want the challenge of balancing the needs of specific zones against each other.

The specific vice/virtue zones are: Envy/Contentment, Avarice/Charity, Gluttony/Temperance, Sloth/Diligence, Lust/Virtue, Wrath/Peace and Pride/Humility. As the souls begin to populate your heaven/hell, reward/punishment structures will begin to appear similar to SIMCITY buildings. Those who try to provide a balance between the specific zones, rather than merely building a generic heaven or hell, will reap the humorous rewards of this game. For example, how is a Lustful Soul punished? Such souls might have to endure Lust Freezers or to patronize either the Punishing Peep Show Pavilions or the Worst Whorehouse In Eternity. At the same time, Virtuous Souls will be able to enjoy The Only Non-Sleazy Singles Bar In Creation or the Tunnels Of Love.

How are Humble Souls to be rewarded? Perhaps, their own Press Conference will make up for their lack of recognition in their previous lives. If that's not enough, how about a DNA Park that ensures their immortality beyond that of mortal sperm banks? Needless to say, it's a very amusing game.

To make matters even more amusing, you can click on a Soulview icon and find out about individual souls whom you are rewarding or punishing. Each time you select Soulview and click on a punishment or reward structure, you get a pop-up view of an alien. Click again and you get the full rap sheet on that alien. Most of them are very funny reading.

"The trail was colder than an icebox in an igloo. I had a list of shady suspects longer than my bar bill at the Dew Drop Inn. But I was on to something. She was 5 feet 4 inches of trouble and I was just an inch away from being 6 feet under."



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HEAVEN BOUND The blue stream atop Hell's Karma Station means reformed souls can move to heaven or be reincarnated.

Should you have a deficiency in any of the types of zones, you'll notice some energy spikes appearing along the roads. These are the lost souls of EMBOs for whom you haven't provided. The good news is that they are color-coded with a satellite atop the energy beam that matches the color of the zone they are seeking. The bad news is that you pay a penalty for every soul you lose in this manner. Still, it adds to the challenge of the game.

Naturally, each zone has its attendant maintenance costs. Such expenses can make it pretty tough on the divine budget. Fortunately, however, you can build infernal institutes (the Burning Annex and Hellward Bound Retreat) and heavenly halls of higher learning (Community College of the Clouds and Halo Institute of Heavenly Technology) in order to transform some of the lost souls into angels and demons. This, in turn, will diabolically/divinely reduce your maintenance costs.

PAVED WITH GOOD INTENTIONS

The roads in AFTERLIFE may not be paved with either the gold described in The Book of Revelation or the good intentions ascribed to hell's feeder routes in folk wisdom, but they are extremely important. Although it seems ironic for astral dimensions being traversed by heavenly/infernal beings, the game states clearly that all travel is handled by means of roads. You can have all the zones you could possibly need for all the types of souls which abound, but if the zones aren't accessible by roads, the zones won't develop.

I found that portions of zones rarely develop if they are more than three squares away from a road. So, as much as possible, it is good to have parallel roads roughly six squares apart. This enables access from both sides and should assure prompt development.

Of course, astute observers will look at the game interface and ask the question, "If roads are the only way to travel, why is there a track icon in the game?" While roads may be the only way to travel *within* the heavenly/infernal dimensions, the game allows for travel *between* the dimensions. If you purchase a Karma Station and run track from the Karma Station to a Karma Portal, you should see a shimmering connection on the screen. This connection will enable the souls who believe in reincarnation to initiate their journey to a new life. Naturally, the assemblage of Powers That Be will reward you with enough pennies from heaven to make the effort worth your while.

TROUBLE IN PARADISE

Naturally, a god game wouldn't be a god game if there weren't any potential cosmic trouble. The version we played had Birds of Paradise that left their mark on heaven and the Bats out of Hell that made sure there was no guano shortage in the theological place of eternal punishment. Another calamity was "My Blue Heaven" where the entire celestial plane got the blues. Yet another was "Hell Freezes Over." Betcha' can't guess what happened in that one. In our version, you had to invoke these troubles on yourself, they didn't show up in gameplay. It's unclear how it will work in the final version.



BIG DADDY SLOTH This anguished alien has a long sentence yet to serve. Using the Soulview icon, you can check on the inhabitants of any reward/punishment structure.

AFTERTHOUGHTS

AFTERLIFE is very much a diverting software toy. It offers more detail and humor than SIMCITY and its descendants, but offers the balance and challenge of its storied predecessor. Thus far, our trek into the AFTERLIFE has been simply divine.

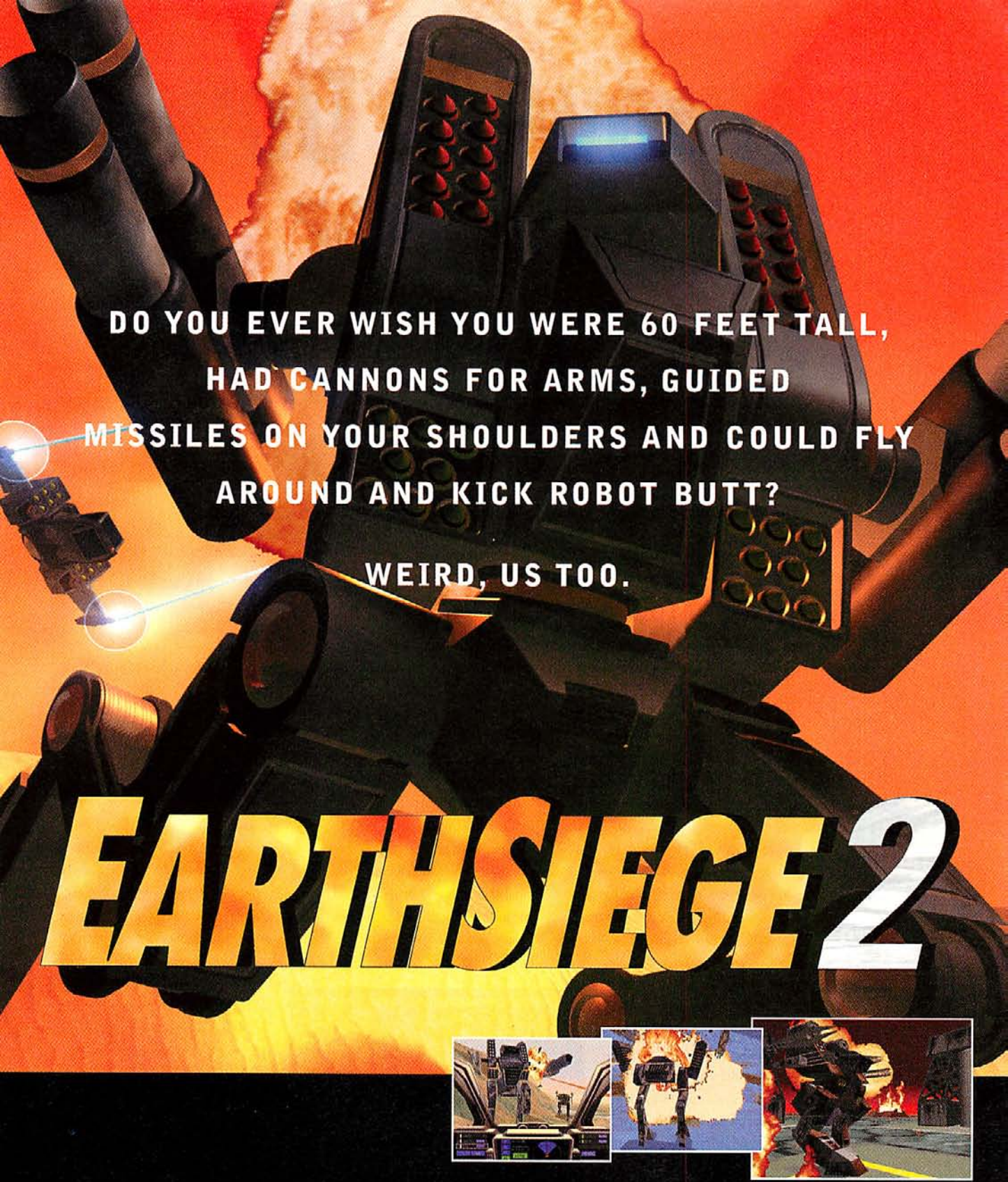
The Theological System Of Afterlife

For those who wonder about the "religion" which undergirds the game system in AFTERLIFE, here are a few observations for those who worry that the game may advocate one type of religion. It doesn't. The basic cosmic structure is Gnostic, since you play a demiurge who must manage heaven and hell for an assemblage of higher powers. Classic Gnosticism perceived matter as evil and hence, the creative forces who designed worlds of matter had to be degenerative of the Ultimate Knowledge, Pure Thought. This is in contrast to the traditional Christian doctrine of the Creator as Omnipotent (All-Powerful).

Yet, the concept of Heaven and Hell is derived specifically from traditional Christianity. References to Dante, Milton and John The Seer undergird this reward/punishment dichotomy. Indeed, the zones of eternity which you create to accomodate new souls are built upon the seven deadly sins and their opposite virtues, as preached by the fathers of the early church.

Finally, oriental religion is not ignored. Provision for reincarnation and karma is present within the game's structure. Though some Christian philosophers such as John Hick see the metaphor of Hell as having a reformatory purpose (i.e. not a final condition), most western theologians would not concur with the game's idea of cleansing souls in Hell for a future life.

AFTERLIFE is simply not intended to reflect any rigorous theological system. It incorporates elements of all kinds of religion in order to have fun. That's all there is to it.



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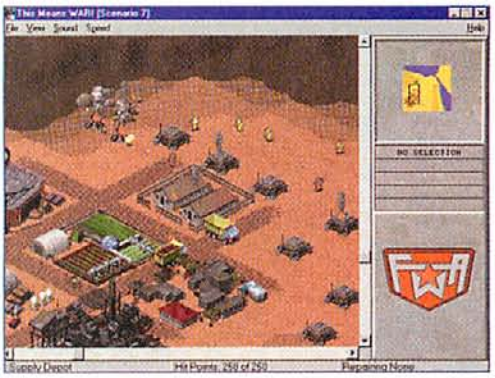
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Throwing Down The Rubber Gauntlet

Crashes Bring Down An Ambitious Wargame

by Arinn Dembo



MINIFIG MUTINY If you don't keep a watchful eye and issue commands diligently, your troops will meander off into enemy territory.

Now here's a cute idea for the Apocalypse: a disgruntled computer game designer, robbed of the corporation he built from scratch and bankrupted by a hostile takeover, decides to bring the planet to its knees. He disappears for a while, resurfacing a few years later on the InterNet as Shadowhawk, the author of the newest and coolest action shooter ever designed. It's called *Snark Hunter*, and the first few levels are available to eager users as shareware; pretty soon everyone with a keyboard has downloaded the game and eaten it up—on the home PC, on the Net, on the LAN at work, even on corporate and military mainframes.

Well, I guess we all know what comes next: wackiness! The killing virus written into *Snark Hunter*—the computer version of Ebola—brings the world as we know it to an end. Power plants shut down, and that sucks; nuclear plants melt down, and that sucks more. Airports are plunged into fire and chaos as automatic navigation and air traffic control computers shut down. World-wide communications evaporate and every major city on earth is in a state of constant riot. Within months, the rioters are organizing, banding together, and forming consortium tribes that govern thousands of square miles, giving everyone in their path two options: join or die.

This is about where we come in. The last remnants of US, Canadian, Mexican and Nicaraguan military forces have banded together into a organization known as FWA. There is no explanation for the initials, but the purpose of the organization is pretty clear: rule the world—or at least free it from all the other tribal consortiums—in the name of truth and justice. As a retired major of the old US armed forces, you find yourself forcibly reactivated and given a field commission as a Colonel in the FWA; your mission is to liberate the globe from the yoke of oppression.

You realize, of course, this means war.

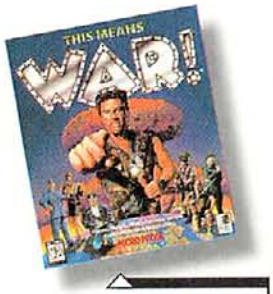


BURNING AND LOOTING Even dyed-in-the-wool pacifists will get satisfaction from watching the enemy base go up in real-time smoke, building by building.

REVIEWING THE TROOPS

Despite the unabashed goofiness of its plot and premise, THIS MEANS WAR!, from MicroProse, is meant to be a serious exercise in strategy and tactics, and the scope of the game is very ambitious. Gameplay consists of discrete tactical engagements around the globe to wipe the enemy's forces from the battlefield. Sometimes you have to kill his units, cripple his production, or turn his men against him, but in the end it usually comes down to wiping out his command center. Although you generally fight from an entrenched position, there are also missions to establish a command post and various facilities, as well as strike missions in which you have to eliminate the enemy before you run out of men.

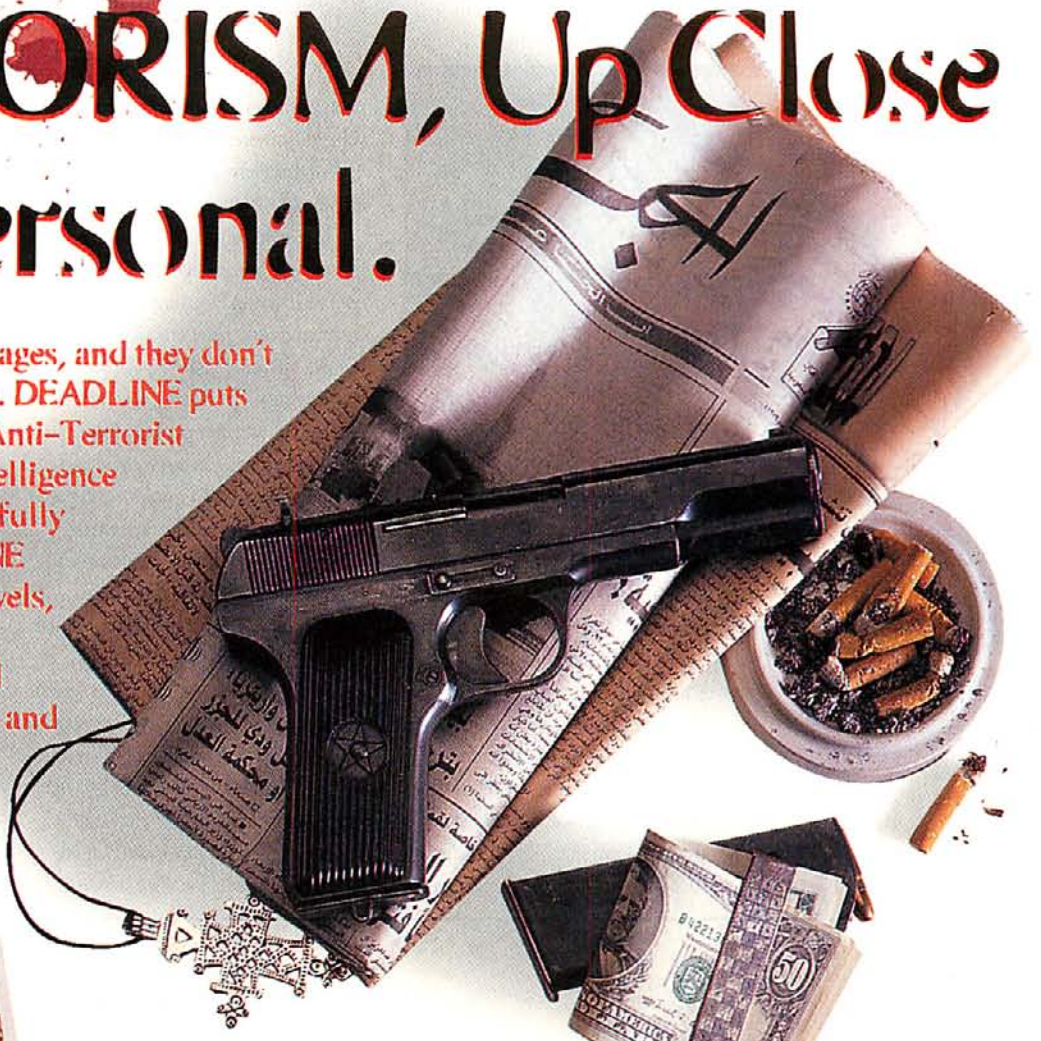
The number of units is very impressive—there are at least forty distinct types, as well as several variations on some basic buildings and troops. You have supporting structures, like command headquarters and civilian population centers, as well as

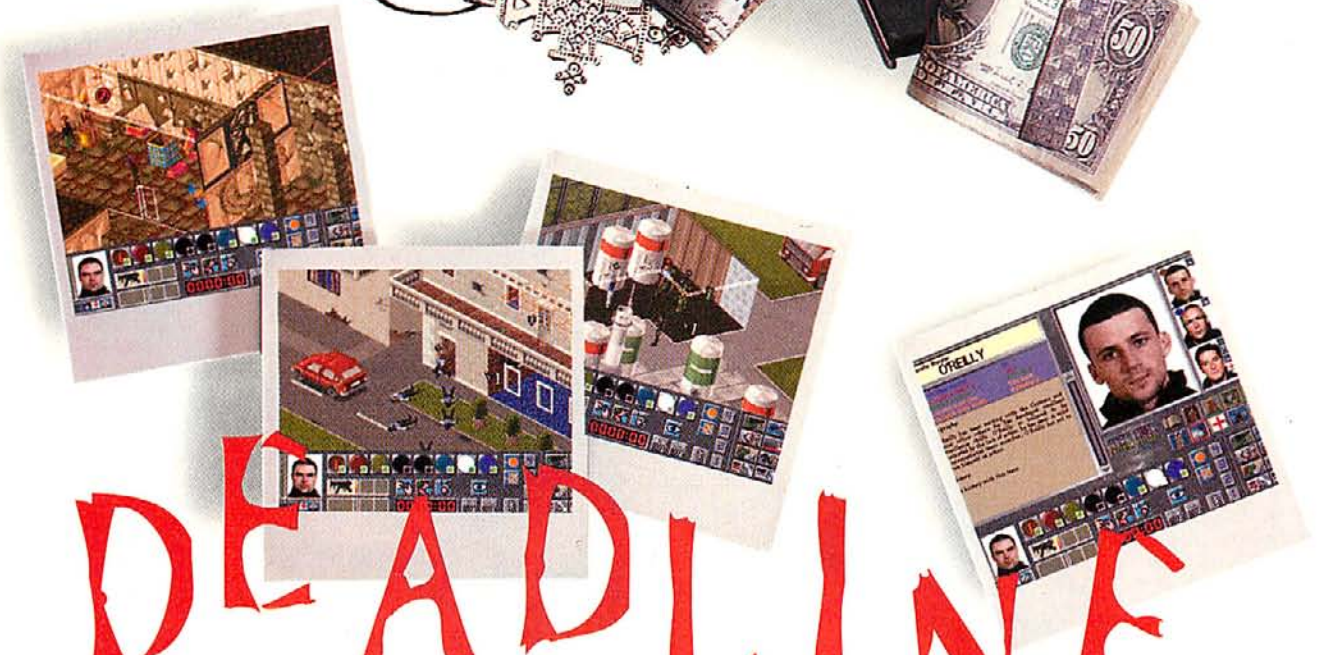


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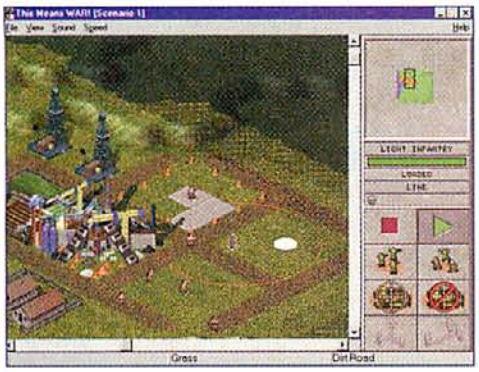
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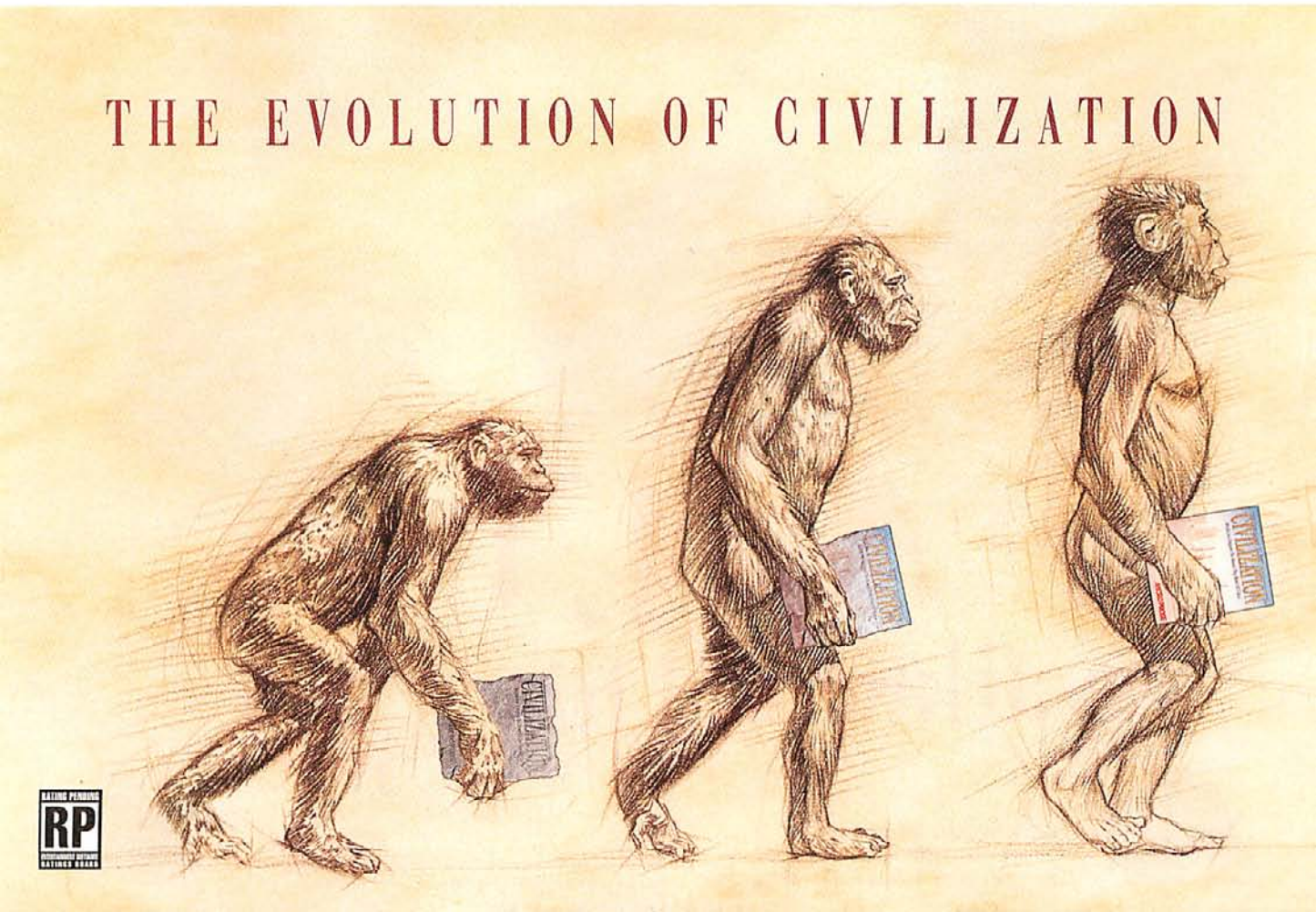
the farms, mills and mines it takes to keep things running, and also a great many production facilities, including barracks, factories, research stations and oil wells. The defensive array is minimal, but pretty keen as well, with supply depots performing repairs, and walls, bunkers, gun turrets, and radar to protect your installation. Troops range from standard light infantry to civilian personnel like scouts and engineers, with a great number of ground vehicles, armored vehicles, air support craft and artillery units available in the latter scenarios of the game.

There's nice detail in the combat system as well. Some buildings have their own toolbars, and the functions of the command center, in particular, are unique; this is the first time I've seen a game trying to include a viable model of intelligence and counter-intelligence operations. Units can be grouped and given commands as a whole—and not only that, but they can be ordered to move in any of seven formations to concentrate fire and protect themselves as they advance. The barracks can produce officers, which can give attack and defense bonuses to any group they lead. There is even a field promotion function which rewards the number of kills a unit makes; after five kills, for example, a light infantryman achieves "veteran" status, and has bonuses to attack and defend.

There's an awful lot of substance in THIS MEANS WAR! (TMW), and fans of strategic and tactical games would love it, except for one thing: it doesn't work. The technical presentation and performance of this game are just awful. Although it has the benefit of running from the Windows 95 operating platform, its system demands are fairly outrageous. On my 486, with 8 MB of RAM, a dual speed CD-ROM and a 4-MB graphic card, THIS MEANS WAR! ran like molasses. At the game's maximum speed, units crawled across the screen at an agonizing snail's pace, and scrolling across the screen was jerky, slow and graceless. Coordinating strikes and diversions was a problem, because I had no idea how long it would take to cross terrain.

Worse, this title will crash your system, repeatedly. There is simply no explanation for TMW's poor technical performance other than slapdash programming. In a game where so much clever conceptual work has been done, this kind of bad craftsmanship is doubly unfortunate; it's

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like pounding teakwood planks together with rusty nails.

COMMAND AND COPY

Despite the shoddy workmanship, however, THIS MEANS WAR! might still have gotten some time on my hard drive if the same idea hadn't already been done better. TMW bears a great resemblance to COMMAND & CONQUER. These two games are both trying to cover the same ground, and doing it in much the same way, using a science fiction plot and a few minutes of film clips to link a series of discrete tactical engagements into a multi-scenario campaign. However, there is absolutely no comparison in quality. COMMAND & CONQUER is by far the better game, not because it's more clever or complex, but simply because it runs like a dream and achieves everything that the design set out to do.

THIS MEANS WAR! is not without good points. The music is good rock n' roll that's perfect for real-time warfare. There are also more than enough scenarios to keep you busy. And the fictional frame has a certain "gonzo" charm, although it feels as if it was tacked on at the last minute; in any case, pummeling opponents with names like Crocodile Chandi and Napolienne isn't all bad. Whether you prefer C&C's political melodrama to TMW's cruel and unusual puns is largely a matter of taste.

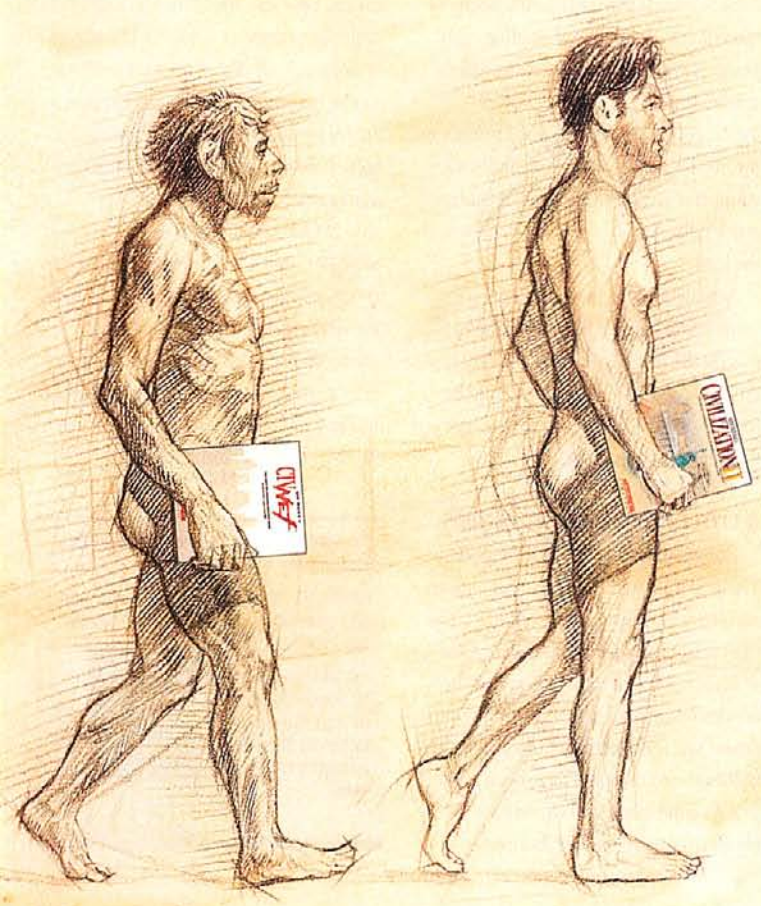
THIS MEANS WAR! should have been better. The material is all there; it's the execution that's lacking. I would be happy to buy an updated version, with everything the same—just much, much faster and cleaner—and a sequel with more modern graphics and sound would be even more welcome. But until we see one or the other, gamers slapped with a rubber gauntlet would be best advised to turn the other cheek.

APPEAL: Strategy and tactics fans with an appetite for puns and caricature.

PROS: Lots of units, good soundtrack, interesting combat details like spies, formations, and officer training.

CONS: The game is prone to crashes, and it runs like a slug even on fast machines.

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DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

Wargame Lite

Power Will Give You A Quick Strategy Buzz, But It Soon Wears Off

by Mike Fay



FOUR SQUARE All play occurs on a small, fixed board with four players, reflective of the game's limited scope.

IBM's foray into the wargaming industry sounds like a bad beer commercial. "Are you about to invade Russia for the forty-fifth time? STOP! Try the new, fast-paced strategy game that's sweeping the nation: POWER: THE GAME, from IBM. It's a quick and easy way to kick some butt, either against the computer or your favorite victim. If you want to invade Normandy, you'll have to fly there; but for lite, fast fun, this is the place..."

POWER falls somewhere between checkers and *Axis and Allies*. There are nine fairly simple units, and the same game board is always used. There are always four players (human or AI) who start in the corners of the board with identical sets of pieces. The object of the game is to collect power points by invading other players' territory and overpowering their stacks with your stronger ones.

The game is positioned as part of a series of Internet games by IBM. The head-to-head options offered are good, and include built-in Internet IP address support. Simple, effective rules make learning the game easy. Unlike most wargames, when one stack beats another, it *captures* it, instead of destroying it. Power begets power and, together with timed rounds (which last up to two minutes), this game moves fast. It is hard to imagine a game lasting longer than forty minutes or so.

PEEPING ROM

Although the rules say POWER uses simultaneous movement, be forewarned that this is not true for AI opponents. They peek at your moves, which gives them a huge advantage; the AI can see where players move, but you can't. You have to assume the worst—that anything the AI can counter with or throw at you, it will. Meanwhile, AI players have the luxury of spreading their forces thin, getting extra power points and making moves against smaller stacks. Their overall power increases quickly. Upshot: good fortune in the first ten turns will make or break the game. If you can't swing a major capture quickly, the AI will probably run away with the lead.

Actually, in solo play, you can win the game about half the time consistently, even at the toughest setting. With such an otherwise weak AI, this game would be too easy to beat if it weren't for the fact that the computer cheats.

A LITTLE MORE VOLTAGE, PLEASE?

POWER suffers from a lack of options. There is only one fixed map (although you can change the wallpaper behind it). You can't select the power values associated with units, change the game so that units are destroyed, or change the number of power units one receives from squares. All of these features would have been fairly easy to implement, and would have allowed for more options and longer games. Likewise, the game has a variety of multiplayer options, yet it can't be played by hotseat (only one of the four positions can be human). It could have been quick fun for gamers young and old within a household, being such a fast, straightforward game.

POWER is certainly no ALLIED GENERAL, and it lacks the needed depth to occupy true wargamers. But as a quick and dirty game to divert your strategic attentions for an hour or so, POWER provides a good diversion. Its limited scope and lack of depth, however, mean it won't stay long on your hard drive.



Price: $31.50
Minimum Requirements: 486-33, 8 MB RAM, SVGA graphics, 1 MB hard drive space, 2x CD-ROM, Windows 3.1 or Win95, mouse; supports Sound Blaster compatible sound cards
Recommended: 486-66, 20 MB hard drive space
of Players: 1-4; 2 by modem, up to 4 by network or Internet
Protection: None (CD must be in drive)
Designer: Power Games International
Publisher: IBM Atlanta, GA (800) 426-7235
Reader Service #: *338*

APPEAL: Head-to-head wargamers looking for a quickie.

PROS: It's fast, easy to learn, and has good multiplayer options, including Internet play.

CONS: Limited options, cheating AI and little depth lower its flexibility and solo replay value.

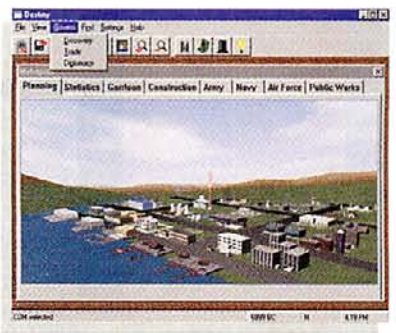
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INTERACTIVE MAGIC PRESENTS

DESTINY

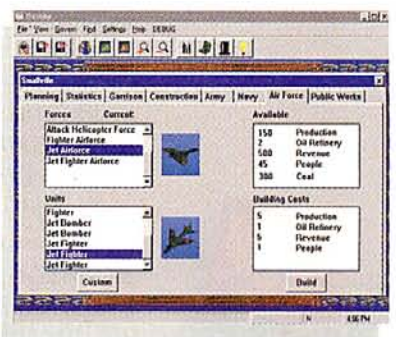
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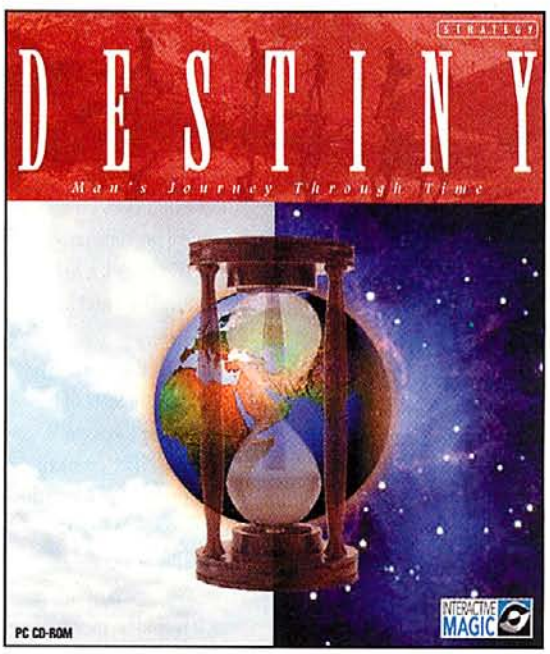
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DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY / INTERMEDIATE / ADVANCED

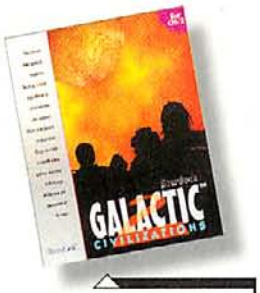
Where Few Have Gone Before

Galactic Empire Building In The Vast Emptiness Of OS/2 Space

by Tim Carter

If you've been Warped for any period of time, you know there aren't many native-mode OS/2 games out there vying for your attention. The original GALACTIC CIVILIZATIONS is probably the best-known OS/2 game, which is a little like saying it's the prettiest girl in an all-boy's school. But GALACTIC CIV was still a game you could bring home to mom: it had decent graphics, a variety of AI personalities, and galactic expansion and conquest models that have been compared to CIVILIZATION and MASTER OF ORION.

GALACTIC CIVILIZATIONS 2 has many new and interesting twists on this time-honored genre, particularly in terms of economic development and planning. Sadly, however, it has a weak combat system (which is thankfully not crucial to this type of game). GALCIV2's downfall, though, is its plodding pace; it is simply too slow.

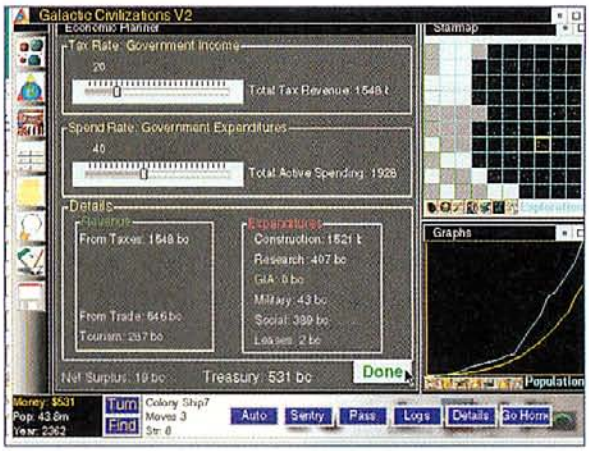


Price: $59.95
System Requirements: OS/2 (2.1) or higher, IBM compatible 386 or better (Pentium recommended), 8 MB RAM, VGA graphics (SVGA graphics recommended), 2 MB RAM, 2x CD-ROM drive, mouse; supports most major sound cards.
of Players: 1
Protection: Manual look-up
Designer: Brad Wardell
Publisher: Stardock Systems, Inc.
Canton, MI
313-453-0328
Reader Service #: *339*

GALCIV2 players begin where they do in most games of this ilk, with a single colony ship, minimal technology, and no knowledge of the wider galaxy. The galaxy is made up of quadrants, each of which may contain star systems, which in turn can have up to five planets each. The beginning game is comprised of exploration and initial colony development, as each side races to expand their borders as much as possible before running into other civilizations.

The middle game is your standard "get as strong as possible without uniting everyone else against you" type campaign, made interesting here by a much more binding set of diplomatic ties. Bipolar galaxies evolve frequently, making wars both more interesting and a question of attrition, rather than wit or guile.

The end game, like others in this genre, involves either uniting or wiping out all of the competing races, leaving the player in control of the known universe. The computer keeps score, and will also rate your civilization based on its decency and sensitivity to its allies.



SALVATION FOR WARP GALACTIC CIV2 is a welcome game for OS/2 users, and is actually a decent game with a good economic model and tough AI.

My biggest problem with GALCIV2 is that building planet improvements simply takes way too long. Even if you concentrate spending on planetary development rather than military construction or research, you will likely end up with a huge number of potential improvements and a major wait between each one. Skewing spending also puts one into a major technological deficit, ultimately undermining the military capabilities of your empire.

The slow pace is unfortunate, as the rest of the economic system is actually rather neat. Players control their spending and savings, and must decide between investing in industry and simply buying what they want from external contractors. Interestingly enough, you can either buy the desired item outright, or pay a down-payment and then an extended lease. The lease option allows crash buying programs in the event of a crisis, but the terms are often unfavorable in the long term. Too many leases will really drain your cash flow, cutting into the amount of money available for capital building programs, so the trick is to balance immediate and long-term needs.

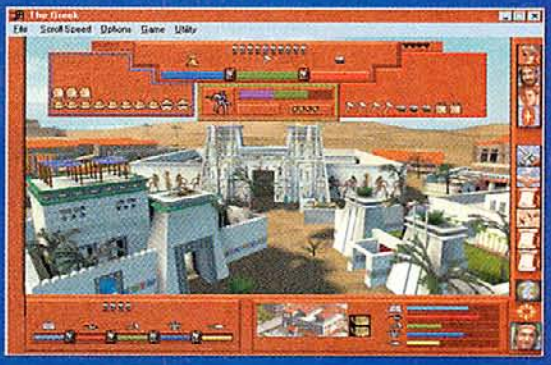
You can raise money through the three Ts of big-time revenue: taxes, trade and tourism. The problem with taxes, though, is that the tax rate is on a galactic level. While I can see the logistical benefits of a single tax rate, and I don't want to raise anyone's ire in an election year, it would be nice to be able to tweak it for planets which are either particularly rich and happy or are poor, unhappy, and rebellious. Peaceful civilizations benefit greatly from extended trade routes. A major trade initiative can generate as much cash, after a few hundred years of ship-building, as the entire tax base. Beware of trade wars, however,

Guess WHO'S coming TO plunder?

Actual screen shot



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since declaring war can be difficult if your entire economy is dependant on trade with the civilization you wish to attack.

Combat in GalCiv2 is pretty straightforward...and, after a while, pretty dull. Individual ships fight highly abstracted battles over which players have no direct control. You simply move your ship into a square occupied by the enemy and the computer blows up one of the combatants. It is possible to combine many ships into a battle fleet, although this has no effect on combat. This tact is useful, though, to diffuse micromanagement of units, especially when you have many ships to direct.



CUTOUT KLINGONS You can't customize ships in GALACTIC CIV2, and the combat is very simplified when compared to DOS-based strategy games.

Actually, the entire space movement interface could have been better thought out. Ships may be moved individually on a square-by-square basis, but this can become irretrievably tedious with anything other than the most minimal fleet. The designers have provided an autopilot function that allows you to direct their ships to any explored point in the galaxy, which works well for colonization, but not during warfare. Autopilot just doesn't give you enough flexibility; your all-powerful battlefleet, en-route to a preset waypoint, may fly right past an invading enemy fleet!

Because the screen flips rapidly from one autopilot move to the next, if one of your ships gets close to a hostile alien craft, you will have to remember which quadrant it was in and then switch back to it later to turn the autopilot off. Since all the ships of each class look the same, this is difficult and frustrating, especially when you have many wandering at one time.

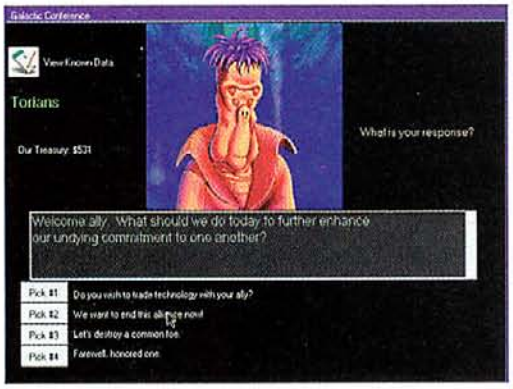
Ships cannot be custom designed. Instead, different and more powerful classes become available as the supporting technology is researched. In keeping with the simplicity of the combat system, ships are only rated for attack, defense, movement and strength. Each alien race has its own set of ships, which also become available as the race develops its technology.

GalCiv2 boasts five levels of AI, the uppermost of which is pretty darn good. On the other hand, with a simple combat system and a straightforward set of building priorities, the computer does not have much to screw up, either. GalCiv2 ran free of crashes, and the sound was easy to install and worked well. Rather than supplying a constant soundtrack, various themes come and go in conjuction with specific events. I suspect this was done in an attempt to keep the music from becoming monotonous—if so, it succeeded nicely. As the documentation freely admits, however, the game runs slow when playing in a larger galaxy with the full complement of computer opponents.

The game is also not without technical problems. Occasionally the graphics will not refresh when switching between screens, so that last screen you viewed remains as the background to the presently active screen. This is somewhat annoying, but does not affect game play. On the other hand, the interface has a tendency to skip ahead of the player when presenting sequential information. For instance, when you colonize a planet, you are given the option of beginning construction on that planet's first improvement, as well as its first space ship. Frequently, however, before you can make a selection, the computer moves on to other planets in your possession which have finished their own projects and need new orders. The computer never returns to the newly-colonized planet, and unless you remember to select it from the planet menu, it will never begin building anything. When you have dozens of planets in development and are colonizing worlds as quickly as possible, it is quite possible to lose track of a particular colony and only discover 20 game-years later that it has been lying fallow while the alien hoards approached.

I realize that the pickings are pretty sparse for OS/2 users out there, and GalCiv2 is by no means a bad game. I just can't help feeling that with a little more playtesting and a little more attention to pace, it would have been much more fun. Still, the economic system provides players with many more options and much greater interconnectivity between economic decisions than most civilization-type games.

Who will want to spend the money for GalCiv2? Well, galactic builders, particularly patient galactic builders, will probably get full value for their dollars. The more action-inclined warlike strategists may want to pass this one by.



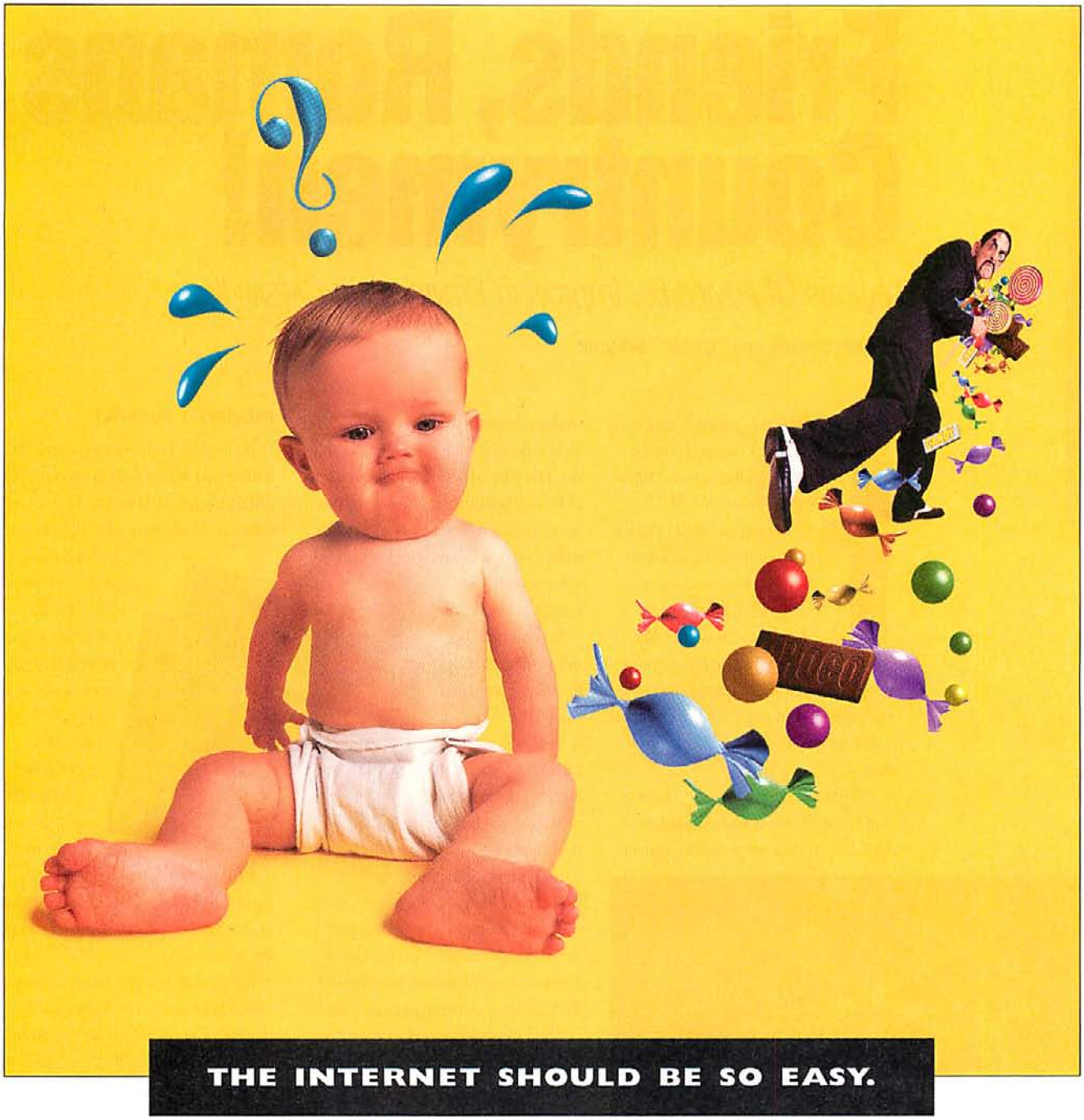
ACTUALLY INTELLIGENT Galactic Civ2's AI is pretty tough at the more difficult levels, whether in combat or in diplomatic negotiations.

APPEAL: It won't make DOS users run out to buy OS/2, but this game is definitely a welcome respite from the OS/2 gaming drought.

PROS: GalCiv2 has a neat economic model, is simple to learn, and has excellent AI.

CONS: The pace of the game is too slow, the combat is weak, and it suffers from a few technical problems.

CG RATED



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Circle Reader Service #277

Friends, Romans, Countrymen!

Legions Of Advice For Improving Provinces In CAESAR II

by Alan Emrich and "Otmar" Schlunk

From paving stone to raising palaces, CAESAR II puts the growth of the Roman Empire in your hands. While Governor, you must build the provincial capital, suppress unruly tribes, crush barbarians, and deal swiftly with domestic unrest and other calamities. On top of everything, the Emperor stands as a shadow over all your works, with his Imperial hand out, raiding your coffers in the name of taxes.

For those seeking a more firm foundation in this absorbing game of ancient SIMCITY building, we would like to offer the following tips. If you follow our advice and get an early enough start, who knows? Perhaps you *can* build Rome in a day!



MONEY'S THE THING Whoever said "Money isn't everything" obviously didn't play CAESAR II; denarii is the prime ingredient for empire building.

THE THREE PILLARS OF STABILITY

First, raise a huge base of plebeian workers. An initial workforce of 100 to 200 plebes should get things rolling smoothly, so set their initial payroll at approximately 25 to 30 denarii. In a month or two, after your city is laid out as far as your budget will go, you can always scale back on these government employees a little.

Second, pick the side of the river with the smaller amount of land (it will be easier to defend, and barbarian entry is more likely to pop up on the more landed side of the river), and start by laying out a "business district" in your capital. Find a corner away from the river, wall it in, and start by industrializing there. The above corner of your city creates a solid initial business district where the least harm comes to property values.

Third, closer to the river, you want to build your high-value housing area with the goal of building large palaces. Since these are 3x3 buildings (they can each house 500 people—so you don't need a lot of them to have a big city) a good starting point is a 6x6 square of housing surrounded with all the fixings. If space is a problem, a 3x6, 4x6 or 5x6 area will work pretty well, too. If you're lucky, a 6x6 area can eventually have up to four palaces and house 2,000 people. One or two of these should be all you need to rake in the bucks and reach the next promotion. You also want your housing area to have complete hospital and library coverage, as well as being walled off.

CG TIPS!

If you're producing more resources than your city businesses can convert, build an extra warehouse on the Provincial Level to store the excess. Eventually, the emperor or a new business you build will soak up the excess material.

PROVINCIAL PUNDITRY

Build at least one industry and either a trading post or port early in the game. This will supply goods for various businesses in your city. Always remember the ratio: one fully manned industry (30 plebes) can support up to three like businesses in town. Note that a busy trading post or a port with a shipyard will do about as well.

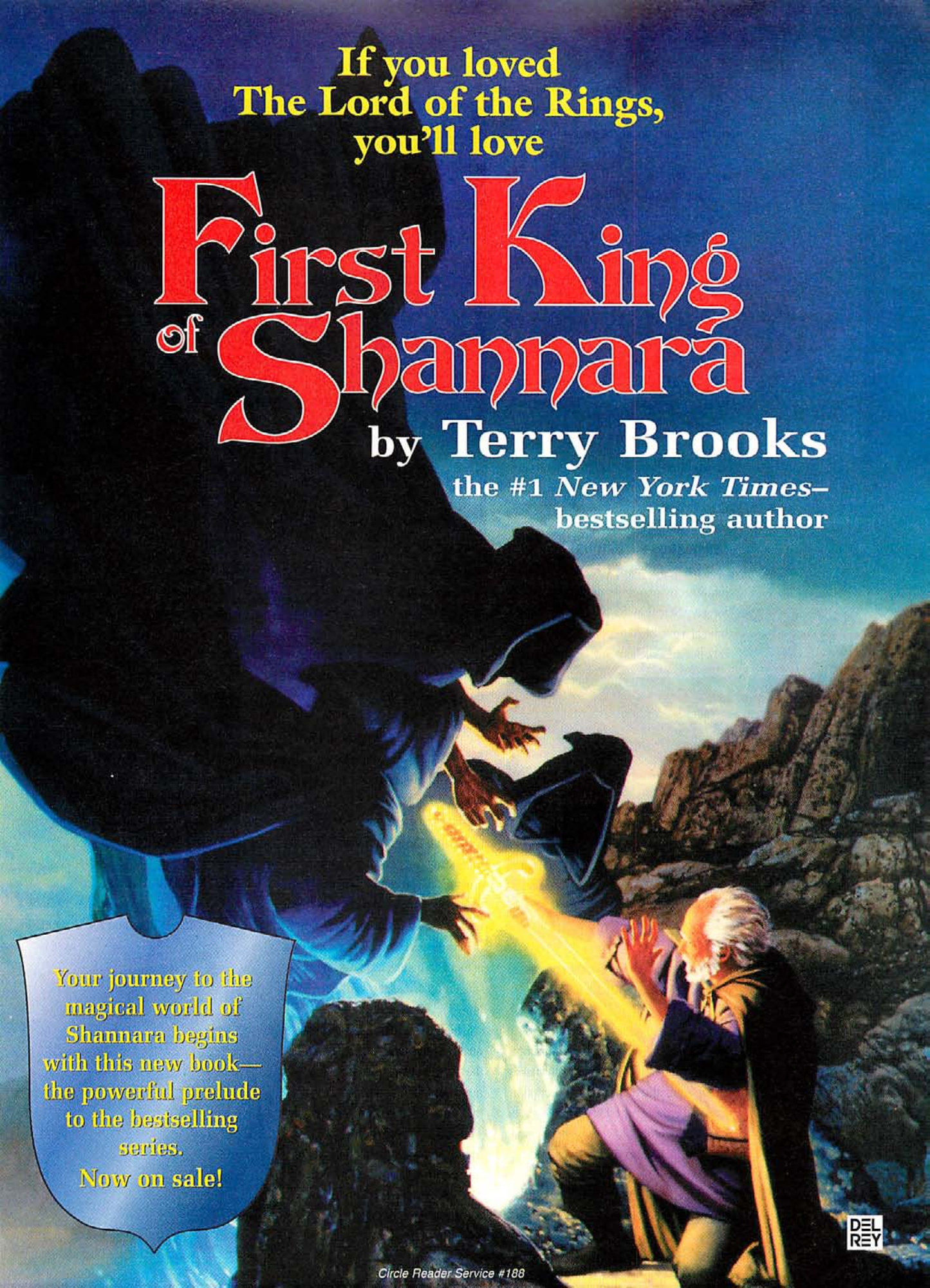
Always connect all your industries by road to your capital. *Don't* block off these roads with gates for any prolonged period of time (trade is effectively cut off along any gated roads).

For defense, you don't need to form a cohort right away when starting a province. One tactic is to let the enemy come to your city and then steer them to the side of the river you're not on. Once there, they can only look longingly across the river at your city until they eventually get bored and leave.

To exercise this tactic, have all the provincial roads enter your city from its uninhabited side. Building provincial walls in strategic places to divert barbarians also works (you might have to build a small cohort somewhere before you can do this). If trouble does enter your side of the river, build towers in their path to slow and kill them.

A KILLER COHORT

After you've built up your province,


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build a big cohort. You want at least 100 more troops than any barbarian tribe you've seen, so a 600 to 1200 man army is a good size.

Place this killer cohort near your capital, since this is the destination of most enemies. If you can afford it, and are besieged with barbarians from several different places, build a second cohort near where the barbarians frequent. If they're giving you trouble, don't hesitate to go in a wipe them out.

A *weak* tribe produces armies of 70+ troops and is defended by 150. A *local* tribe produces armies of 200+ troops and defends itself with 300. A *strong* tribe produces armies of 300+ troops and defends itself with 450. Finally, a *powerful* tribe produces armies of 400+ troops and defends itself with 600.



CHARITY CASE When Caesar comes asking for tribute, you can wait a year or two before you tithe him, but make sure you eventually do pay. Also, if you must bribe him, do so only as a last resort.

SENSE AND CENTURIONS

What troops to use is up to you. Heavy infantry cost about five denarii per month for anywhere from 55-100 troops. They train at a rate of 20 per month (the slowest), but are excellent one-on-one fighters.



WALLUS MAXIMUS Wall off your residential district as soon as possible, or the property value will never rise above the low 40s.

Light infantry train at a rate of 40 per month, and are mustered from conscripting citizens. While this technically makes them "free," the higher your conscription rate is, the more unrest you'll have in your capital city. Unrest lowers the population tax you can levy on your citizens, and decreases your income substantially. A crisis, though, will unite your capital's citizenry. This allows you to boost your conscription rate to about 30 percent for a year without any serious long-term effects. Otherwise, the maximum sustainable conscription rate is between 12-19 percent, depending on the province. Conscription beyond five percent, though, will start making the citizens unhappy, while a rate below that will keep them content. For this reason, when founding a new province, it's a good idea to keep the conscription rate at zero for as long as possible.

Slingers are obtained from pressing plebes into the army. Since they train at the speedy rate of 80 per month, in an emergency you can simply shut down your labor forces and build your legions very quickly. You can also recruit masses of new plebes by simply throwing money at them, so getting a large group of slingers up in a relatively short period of time is relatively easy.

The final troop type are auxiliaries. The quality of auxiliaries varies depending on the type. Each province has a limited number of them—so once they die, they're gone forever (use them wisely). They cost a lot at 20 denarii per month for 50 troops, but they all train in one month, no matter how many you order. After you use them you can disband them until they're needed again.

When it comes to the battles themselves, avoid any that you don't think you can easily win. If you have no slingers, or if your opponent has many bowmen, your best bet for minimizing losses is to let the computer fight for you. If you have some slingers, however, you should probably do your own fighting. A good strategy is using your slingers to whittle down advancing barbarians while the infantry forms a defensive turtle position. Once the enemy is demoralized by your slingers, your other troops can mop them up fairly quickly.

THE TAXMAN COMETH

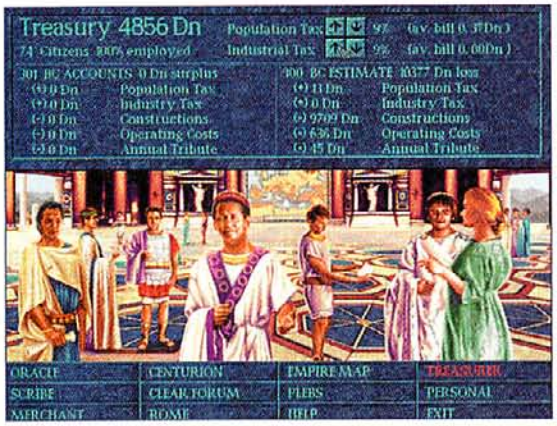
The ideal tax rate varies from province to province, and also depends on what is

CG TIPS!

The amount of population taxes you take in from a particular building is proportional to the land value times the number of residents living in the building (LV x POP=TAXES). Large palaces should thus be your main residential goal. Their land value of 62, times their population density of 500, amounts to an enormous 31,000 denarii in taxes.



Circle Reader Service #255



IMPERIAL REVENUE SERVICE In an easy province, the highest tax rate to use on industry and population is nine percent, while hard provinces can stand no more than six percent.

happening in your provincial capital. The best way to find out what rate works well for you is to increase rates on industry and population by one percent per month, until the respective growth rate dips below *extremely good*. At this point, you know you're on the edge of the maximum sustainable tax rate. To re-establish your *extremely good* growth rate, drop the tax rate, wait for growth to get *extremely good* again, and then maintain taxes at the threshold you discovered. In any case, *never* raise tax rates over 9%.

and culture.

To raise your empire rating, simply improve your province. Build ports, connect all the towns with roads, and provide access to all the border towns.

Your peace rating automatically increases by two percent every year. Every battle you win increases this rating by another percentage point or two. Likewise, every battle you lose, or any successful attack by barbarians, lowers this rating by a percentage point or two. Thus, time and victory are the keys to peace.

Prosperity goes up as your revenues increase. This can therefore be increased with more people in your city, higher taxes (up to the maximum sustainable amount), and higher land values.

You can raise your culture rating by building more amenities or religious, entertainment, educational and sanitation buildings. The amount of improvement in your culture rating roughly parallels what you pay for. If you're scrimping, gardens are the most cost-effective improvement you can make. Circuses, libraries, basilicas, arenas and hospitals are the quickest way to improve your rating on a cost-per-building basis.



LET THE ARCHERS HAVE IT Send a group or two of heavy infantry or cavalry to destroy enemy missile troops as quickly as possible, before they wreak havoc on your troops

SELF PROMOTION: "I SMELL RANK"

Once your city is flourishing and your military is unstoppable, *only then* is it time to think about lining your own pockets and getting a promotion. Your promotion is dependent on four different ratings that the oracle gives you. These are: empire, peace, prosperity

Once you're offered that next promotion, check your personal funds. If you don't have enough cash to start your next province off right, boost the amount of money you make per month (as much as the city can afford to pay you) and wait ten more years.

It takes roughly 15,000 to 25,000 denarii to start a new province off with a walled residential and business district and a couple provincial industries. The emperor will supply you with roughly 20,000, 15,000, 12,000, 7,000 or 5,000 of that amount (depending on which of the five difficulty levels you're playing at). You'll need the rest from your own, personal savings.

SENATUS CONSULTUM ULTIMUM

So, the ultimate decree of the Senate is this: money. It's the most important factor in building Rome to its greatest potential. If you don't have it, get it, because you will certainly need it. Emperor Caligula, who squandered the vast treasury surplus left him by his stingy uncle Tiberius, imposed extraordinary taxes to raise money (taxing law suits, panderers and prostitutes, among others). While you can't be so brazen, clever play will keep your coffers full and the wagons and chariots of local commerce running at full speed.

CG TIPS!

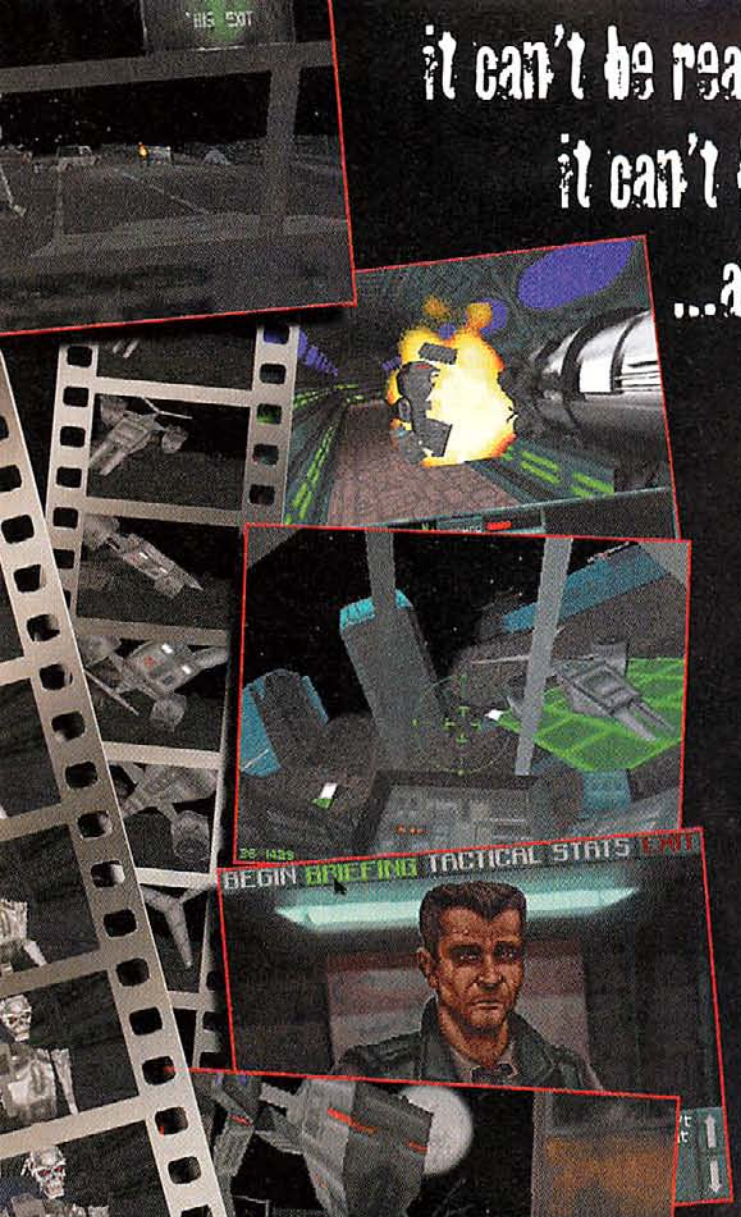
Don't keep too much of a cash surplus until you are ready to move on, because Caesar will come to collect taxes if your coffers are bursting. As a rule of thumb, if you have less than 3000 denarii, Caesar knows you're broke and never takes any. If you have more than 8000, he'll start hitting you with maximum tax rate of about 35 percent!

Plebes Please

There's an order of importance for Plebeians, and the top priority for labor goes under the job descriptions of fire and water. Having a slight excess here of 5-10 plebes is a good investment; more than that is wasteful. Here are some numbers to keep in mind:

- 1 plebe per 8 squares of buildings for fire protection
- 1 plebe per 8 road squares
- 2 plebes per fountain or bath (wells and reservoirs require no plebes)
- 1 plebe per 8 regular wall squares to "man" them (towers require *no* plebes and produce soldiers when barbarians appear)
- 10 plebes can produce 1 unit of goods per month in the provinces—these 10 plebes will keep a single related business going at full capacity
- Each provincial industry can handle up to 30 plebes for industry, so that three businesses can be stocked when running at full capacity.

it can't be reasoned with,
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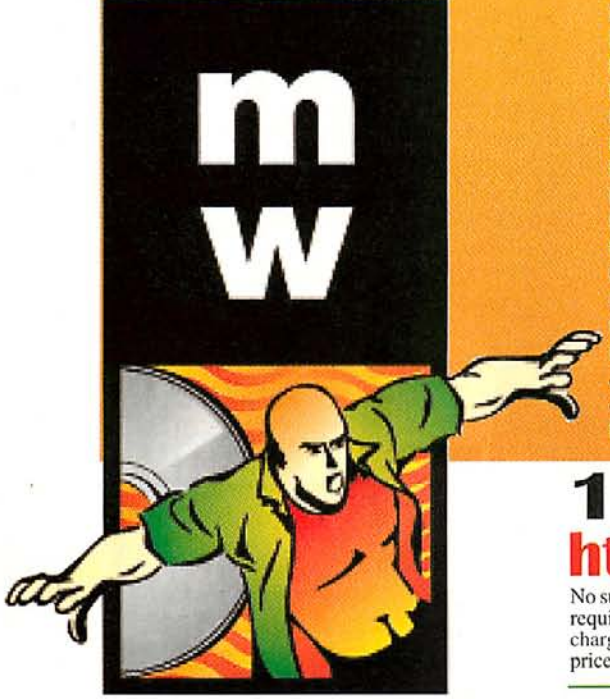


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Nova Collection 2	$24
Nude:Private Works	$15
Oriental 1-3 ea	$16
Overexposed	$28
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Ropes & Chains	$19
Select A Pet	$29
Sensuous Girls 3-D	$29
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'ROMSOFT 3 PAK' Captured Elegance, Penetration and She's So Sleazy combine to make this 3 pak HOT, HOT, HOT! **3 CD's $29**



'ROMSOFT 6 PACK 2' Babe Patrol, Hot Dog Girls of Florida, Luscious Ladies in Lingerie, Extasy Suites, Striptease and A Shot in the Pink are what you'll get in this sexy 6 pack! **6 CD'S $39**

CGW496A

HALL OF FAME

Welcome to the Cooperstown of Computer Games. Here, raised upon pedestals, you'll find the games that broke the records, established the benchmarks, and held gamers in delighted trances for hours untold.

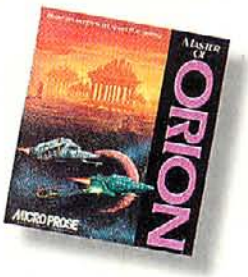
INDUCTION CEREMONY

DOOM
ID SOFTWARE 1993



It took all of five seconds to boot up DOOM, take two steps forward with the new American Hero and realize, "Holy Cow, this is *something new*." At that moment, we knew we'd found The Next Big Thing. People who had never before played, or even heard of computer games, were asking "What's this Doomed thing?" Game developers everywhere scrambled to develop "Better than DOOM!" titles. But no one could match the gritty, visceral feel of blasting howling Imps into a bloody pulp with the Rocket Launcher, or the pleasure of stalking an unsuspecting Deathmatch opponent (or two) with a shotgun. The story behind DOOM is simply that the guys at id Software wanted to make a game for themselves to play—with and against each other. And it shows: the first month it was rated, DOOM leapt to the top of the *CGW* Top 100 Poll (April, 1994); it has remained in the Top 10 action games category ever since. Part of the game's rapid rise to popularity can be attributed to its unconventional distribution. id broke with tradition by releasing the entire first episode of DOOM as shareware. Furthermore, DOOM fired the shot heard around the world in the network gaming revolution (action games in particular); being able to play at work over a network drove worker productivity down and MIS eyebrows up. Veteran gamers may recall that DOOM's seeds were laid a few years earlier in CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN 3D, one of the first first-person 3-D environment games around. But to a whole new generation of computer gamers, DOOM is it.

MASTER OF ORION
MICROPROSE 1993



At first glance, this game from an unknown company in Texas seemed like just another space game. After all, the recipe for MASTER OF ORION is hardly original: a mix of humans and weird alien starfaring races; lots of combat, trade and diplomacy; quickly-changing technology to help conquer a cold, uncaring universe. It didn't help that the first release (like so many from MicroProse in recent years) required a patch, or that Steve Barcia's design lacked both high-res graphics and an intuitive interface. But Simtex' brainchild eventually became one of the most admired strategy games in many years. MOO, as it was affectionately dubbed, had an edge over the competition in that the aliens—Darlok spies, intelligent and diffident Psilons, Silicoids who could survive in utter wastelands, *et al*—were quirky and interesting, requiring radically different playing styles. MOO also featured a remarkable diplomatic AI which, even though copied in several designs since, has yet to be surpassed. The combination of technological advances, the mysteries of galactic exploration and the tactics of space and planetary combat surpass even SSG's REACH FOR THE STARS. And the intricacies of spaceship design alone could keep you busy until the next generation of aliens hatch from Antares. Essential for any gamer even remotely interested in exploring or conquering the universe.

Inductees Prior To 1989

- **BATTLE CHESS** (Interplay Productions, 1988)
- **CHESSMASTER** (The Software Toolworks, 1986)
- **DUNGEON MASTER** (FTL SOFTWARE, 1987)
- **EARL WEAVER BASEBALL** (Electronic Arts, 1986)
- **EMPIRE** (Interstel, 1978)
- **F-19 STEALTH FIGHTER** (MicroProse, 1988)
- **GETTYSBURG: THE TURNING POINT** (SSI, 1986)
- **KAMPFGRUPPE** (Strategic Simulations, 1985)
- **MECH BRIGADE** (Strategic Simulations, 1985)
- **MIGHT & MAGIC** (New World Computing, 1986)
- **M.U.L.E.** (Electronic Arts, 1983)
- **PIRATES** (MicroProse, 1987)
- **SIMCITY** (Maxis, 1987)
- **STARFLIGHT** (Electronic Arts, 1986)
- **THE BARD'S TALE** (Electronic Arts, 1985)
- **ULTIMA III** (Origin Systems, 1983)
- **ULTIMA IV** (Origin Systems, 1985)
- **WAR IN RUSSIA** (Strategic Simulations, 1984)
- **WASTELAND** (Interplay Productions, 1986)
- **WIZARDRY** (Sir-Tech Software, 1981)
- **ZORK** (Infocom, 1981)

Modern Inductees

- **FALCON 3.0** (Spectrum HoloByte, 1991)
- **GUNSHIP** (MicroProse, 1989)
- **HARPOON** (Three-Sixty Pacific, 1989)
- **KING'S QUEST V** (Sierra On-Line, 1990)
- **LEMMINGS** (Psygnosis, 1991)
- **LINKS 386 PRO** (Access Software, 1992)
- **M-1 TANK PLATOON** (MicroProse, 1989)
- **RAILROAD TYCOON** (MicroProse, 1990)
- **RED BARON** (Dynamix, 1990)
- **SID MEIER'S CIVILIZATION** (MicroProse, 1991)
- **THEIR FINEST HOUR** (LucasArts, 1989)
- **THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND** (LucasArts, 1990)
- **ULTIMA VI** (Origin Systems, 1990)
- **ULTIMA UNDERWORLD** (Origin Systems, 1992)
- **WING COMMANDER I & II** (Origin Systems, 1990-91)
- **WOLFENSTEIN 3-D** (id Software, 1992)

Computer game programs have grown so massive and the number of hardware configurations has become so huge that incompatibilities and glitches are frustratingly common.

Software fixes, or "patches," for buggy programs have become a necessary evil until we reach the golden age of standardized platforms and bug-free programs. Red indicates new files.

Absolute Zero Upgrade: Final revision corrects a nasty crash bug in the Hammer and Anvil scenarios. 1/6/96

Advanced Civilization V1.01 Update: Fixes many small problems and the Windows 95 city construction problem. 11/29/95

Battleground: Gettysburg V1.01 Upgrade: Fixes reported bugs and gameplay issues. 1/18/96

Capitalism Update: Fixes a problem with the presidents and another rare item bug. 1/11/96

CivNet Update: Fixes several reported problems. 12/8/95

Command & Conquer V1.19P Patch: Includes fixes for all known bugs to date and some game balance changes. Works with V1.07 or V1.18p. 1/19/96

Crusader: No Remorse V1.21 Update: Includes several new features and fixes. 12/22/95

Flight Unlimited V2.0: Contains two physics fixes, two video fixes, fixes a couple of controller bugs, a mouse driver problem, and adds total energy compensation to the Grob's variometer. 8/30/95

Front Page Sports Football Pro 96: Fixes several technical issues. 1/4/96

Gabriel Knight 2: Fixes all known problems with Gabriel Knight CD and speeds up restore of save games. 1/5/96

Hardball 5 V5.12 Update: Fixes errant force-outs, problems preventing customized stat selections. 12/5/95

Harpoon Classic Mac V1.57j Update: Fixes several user reported bugs and adds air-to-air to the HDS9 BattleSet. 1/11/96

Harpoon Classic Windows V1.55e Update: Fixes several user reported GPFs and adds the Windows Scenario Editor. 1/11/96

Heroes of Might and Magic V1.2 Update: Fixes some problems with connecting via modem and some random crash problems. 10/24/95

Hive Update: Makes the game easier. 12/4/95

MechWarrior 2 DOS Version V1.1 Update: Fixes several things, including the right side taking more damage on mechs, increased joystick support and Windows 95 crash problems. 11/20/95

NHL 96 Update: Fixes a variety of technical problems, including playoff lock-ups or problems with saving playoff games to hard disk. 12/2/95

PBA Bowling for Windows V1.10: Incorporates several fixes and improvements. 12/27/95

Riddle of Master Lu V2.05 Update: Fixes more known problems within the original release, including jumpy mouse movement, switch problems in the billiard room. 1/8/96

Steel Panthers V1.1 Update: Corrects several reported bugs. 10/23/95

Steel Panthers V1.12 Update (Unofficial): Gary Grigsby's patch, tons of fixes by Gary Grigsby himself. Note: SSI does not support this patch. 1/15/96

Stonekeep V1.2 Update: Fixes reported bugs. 1/19/96

Su-27 New and Revised Missions: Contains revisions to several of the training missions, and additional six "Airmanship" missions. 12/21/95

Thunderscape V1.1 Update: Incorporates numerous changes and fixes. 1/3/96

TIE Fighter CD Joystick Update: Should cure problems with Microsoft Sidewinder 3D Pro, Suncom Raptor or other joysticks incorporating axes from joystick 2. 1/23/96

Tigers on the Prowl V1.26: Fixes all known problems and improves some AI functions; may be used to upgrade any previous version of TOP. 10/19/95

Unnecessary Roughness '96 Update: Fixes sound and video problems. 1/5/96



New Patches are on disk.

ZDNet

These patches can usually be downloaded from the major online networks (CompuServe, GEnie, ZDNet) and Computer Gaming World's Web Site (http://www.zdnet.com/~gaming), but can also be obtained from individual software publisher's BBSes or direct from the publisher with proof of purchase.

Publisher BBS Numbers

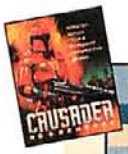
Many of these patches are available directly from the publishers' bulletin board systems. Call with your modem parity settings at N-8-1.

Accolade (408) 296-8800
Apogee (508) 368-7036
Bethesda (301) 990-7552
Blizzard (714) 556-4602
Broderbund (415) 883-5889
Capstone (305) 374-6872
Creative Labs (405) 742-6660
Id Software (508) 368-4137
Impressions (617) 225-2042
InterPlay (714) 252-2822
LucasArts (415) 257-3070
Maxis (510) 254-3869
MicroProse (410) 785-1841
Microsoft (206) 936-6735
NovaLogic (818) 774-9528
Origin (512) 328-8402
Papyrus (617) 576-7472
Sierra Online (206) 644-0112
Spectrum HoloByte (510) 522-8909
SSI (408) 739-6137 or (408) 739 6623
Virgin Interactive (714) 833-3305

THE COMPUTER GAMING POLL • A MONTHLY SURVEY OF THE READERS OF COMPUTER GAMING



You've read our take on the latest games, now here's a chance to see what your fellow gamers think. The CG Top 100 is a monthly tally of game ratings provided by our readers via the CG Poll ballot found in each issue. Approximately 50 games are rated each month, and the results are added to the aggregate results from past months. This historical database serves as a terrific reference for what you, the gamers, feel are the best plays in gaming.



TOP ACTION GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Crusader: No Remorse	Origin	9.94
2	DOOM II	id Software	9.77
3	Dark Forces	LucasArts	9.70
4	Virtual Pool	Interplay	9.52
5	Magic Carpet	Electronic Arts	9.48
6	System Shock	Origin	9.19
7	The Need For Speed	Electronic Arts	9.12
8	Heretic	id Software	9.08
9	Hexen	Raven Software	9.03
10	Descent	Interplay	8.86



TOP ADVENTURE GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Gabriel Knight 2	Sierra	10.19
2	Full Throttle	LucasArts	9.44
3	Woodruff & Schnibble	Sierra	9.28
4	Relentless	Electronic Arts	9.12
5	Ecstatica	Psygnosis	9.09
6	Under A Killing Moon	Access	9.04
7	Legend of Kyrandia 3	Virgin	8.94
8	Phantasmagoria	Sierra	8.91
9	Riddle of Master Lu	Sanctuary Woods	8.83
10	Star Trek: TNG, Final Unity	Spectrum HoloByte	8.75



TOP CLASSIC/PUZZLE GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Monopoly	Virgin Interactive	9.47
2	Incredible Toons	Dynamix	8.86
3	Incredible Machine 2	Sierra	8.85
4	You Don't Know Jack	Berkeley	8.32
5	Clockwerx	Spectrum HoloByte	8.25
6	Hodj n' Podj	Virgin Interactive	8.16
7	Shanghai-Great Moments	Activision	7.75
8	Lemmings Chronicles	Psygnosis	7.47
9	Multimedia Celebrity Poker	New World Computing	7.28
	Bridge Olympiad	QQP	7.28



TOP SIMULATION/SPACE COMBAT GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Wing Commander 3	Origin	10.57
2	TIE Fighter	LucasArts	10.26
3	MechWarrior 2	Activision	10.05
4	NASCAR Racing	Papyrus	10.01
5	U.S. Marine Fighters	Electronic Arts	9.76
6	U.S. Navy Fighters	Electronic Arts	9.60
7	Wings of Glory	Origin	9.56
8	Flight Unlimited	Looking Glass	9.51
9	Aces of the Deep	Dynamix	9.38
10	Fleet Defender	MicroProse	9.25



TOP SPORTS GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	NBA Live '95	Electronic Arts	9.86
2	NHL Hockey	EA	9.72
3	Front Page Sports Football 95	Sierra	9.64
4	FPS Football Pro 96	Sierra	9.40
5	PGA Tour Golf 486	Electronic Arts	8.93
6	Front Page Sports Baseball	Dynamix	8.76
7	Hardball IV	Accolade	8.70
8	Hardball 5	Accolade	8.42
9	Tony LaRussa 3	SSI	8.12
10	Rugby World Cup 1995	Electronic Arts	7.91



TOP STRATEGY GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Warcraft II	Blizzard	10.42
2	X-COM	MicroProse	10.37
3	Command & Conquer	Virgin	9.99
4	Heroes of Might & Magic	New World Computing	9.91
5	Jagged Alliance	Sir-Tech	9.81
6	Master of Magic	MicroProse	9.66
7	Warcraft	Blizzard	9.64
8	X-COM: Terror from the Deep	MicroProse	9.38
9	Warlords II Deluxe	SSG	9.27
10	VGA Planets	Tim Wisseman	9.00



TOP ROLE PLAYING GAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Anvil of Dawn	New World Computing	9.45
2	Might & Magic: Clouds of Xeen	New World Computing	9.07
3	Ravenloft: Stone Prophet	SSI	8.98
4	Arena: The Elder Scrolls	Bethesda	8.83
5	Wolf	Sanctuary Woods	8.64
6	Stonekeep	Interplay	8.42
7	Menzoberranzan	SSI	8.26
8	Ravenloft	SSI	8.16
9	Mordor	TDA	8.00
10	Dark Sun: Wake of the Ravager	SSI	7.64



TOP WARGAMES

	GAME	COMPANY	SCORE
1	Panzer General	SSI	10.46
2	Steel Panthers	SSI	10.29
3	Rise of the West	RAW	9.63
4	Flight Commander 2 Mission Bldr	Avalon Hill	9.48
5	Stalingrad	Avalon Hill	9.38
6	Operation Crusader	Avalon Hill	9.36
7	Flight Commander 2	Avalon Hill	9.35
8	Custer's Last Command	Incredible Simulations	9.12
9	Tanks	SSI	9.00
10	Tigers on the Prowl	HPS Simulations	8.97

Reader Poll #139

	GAME	COMPANY	TYPE	SCORE
★ 1	Wing Commander 3	Origin	SI	10.57
★ 2	Panzer General	SSI	WG	10.46
★ 3	Warcraft II	Blizzard	ST	10.42
4	X-COM	MicroProse	ST	10.37
5	Steel Panthers	SSI	WG	10.29
6	TIE Fighter	LucasArts	SI	10.26
★ 7	Gabriel Knight 2	Sierra	AD	10.19
8	MechWarrior 2	Activision	SI	10.05
9	NASCAR Racing	Papyrus	SI	10.01
10	Command & Conquer	Virgin	ST	9.99
★ 11	Crusader: No Remorse	Origin	AC	9.94
12	Heroes of Might & Magic	New World Computing	ST	9.91
★ 13	NBA Live '95	Electronic Arts	SP	9.86
14	Jagged Alliance	Sir-Tech	ST	9.81
15	DOOM II	id Software	AC	9.77
16	U.S. Marine Fighters	Electronic Arts	SI	9.76
17	NHL Hockey	EA	SP	9.72
18	Dark Forces	LucasArts	AC	9.70
19	Master of Magic	MicroProse	ST	9.66
20	Front Page Sports Football 95	Sierra	SP	9.64
	Warcraft	Blizzard	ST	9.64
22	Rise of the West	RAW	WG	9.63
23	U.S. Navy Fighters	Electronic Arts	SI	9.60
24	Wings of Glory	Origin	SI	9.56
25	Virtual Pool	Interplay	AC	9.52
26	Flight Unlimited	Looking Glass	SI	9.51
27	Flight Commander 2 Mission Bldr	Avalon Hill	WG	9.48
	Magic Carpet	Electronic Arts	AC	9.48
★ 29	Monopoly	Virgin Interactive	CP	9.47
★ 30	Anvil of Dawn	New World Computing	RP	9.45
31	Full Throttle	LucasArts	AD	9.44
32	FPS Football Pro 96	Sierra	SP	9.40
33	Stalingrad	Avalon Hill	WG	9.38
	X-COM: Terror from the Deep	MicroProse	ST	9.38
	Aces of the Deep	Dynamix	SI	9.38
36	Operation Crusader	Avalon Hill	WG	9.36
37	Flight Commander 2	Avalon Hill	WG	9.35
38	Woodruff & Schnibble	Sierra	AD	9.28
39	Warlords II Deluxe	SSG	ST	9.27
40	Fleet Defender	MicroProse	SI	9.25
41	System Shock	Origin	AC	9.19
42	Custer's Last Command	Incredible Simulations	WG	9.12
	The Need For Speed	Electronic Arts	AC	9.12
	Relentless	Electronic Arts	AD	9.12
45	Ecstatica	Psygnosis	AD	9.09
46	Heretic	id Software	AC	9.08
47	Might & Magic: Clouds of Xeen	New World Computing	RP	9.07
48	Under A Killing Moon	Access	AD	9.04
49	Hexen	Raven Software	AC	9.03
50	Tanks	SSI	WG	9.00
	VGA Planets	Tim Wisseman	ST	9.00
52	Ravenloft: Stone Prophet	SSI	RP	8.98
53	Tigers on the Prowl	HPS Simulations	WG	8.97
54	The Grandest Fleet	QQP	ST	8.96
	Perfect General II	QQP	WG	8.96
56	Legend of Kyrandia 3	Virgin	AD	8.94
	Transport Tycoon	MicroProse	ST	8.94
58	PGA Tour Golf 486	Electronic Arts	SP	8.93
59	Phantasmagoria	Sierra	AD	8.91
60	Descent	Interplay	AC	8.86
	Incredible Toons	Dynamix	CP	8.86
62	Incredible Machine 2	Sierra	CP	8.85
63	Hornet	Spectrum HoloByte	SI	8.84
64	Riddle of Master Lu	Sanctuary Woods	AD	8.83
	Arena: The Elder Scrolls	Bethesda	RP	8.83
66	Carriers at War II	SSG	WG	8.82
67	Serf City	SSI	ST	8.80
68	Harpoon II	Three-Sixty Pacific	WG	8.78
69	Caesar II	Sierra	ST	8.76
	Front Page Sports Baseball	Dynamix	SP	8.76
71	Star Trek: TNG, Final Unity	Spectrum HoloByte	AD	8.75
72	Genghis Khan II	Koei	WG	8.74
	Mortal Kombat 3	GT Interactive	AC	8.74
74	1830	Avalon Hill	ST	8.72
75	Hardball IV	Accolade	SP	8.70
76	Buried In Time	Sanctuary Woods	AD	8.65
77	Wolf	Sanctuary Woods	RP	8.64
	King's Quest VII	Sierra	AD	8.64
79	Superheros of Hoboken	Legend	AD	8.62
80	1942 Pacific Air War Gold	MicroProse	SI	8.61
81	Fighter Duel	Philips Media	SI	8.53
82	Magic Carpet 2	EA	AC	8.52
83	Werewolf vs. Comanche	NovaLogic	SI	8.50
	The Horde	Crystal Dynamics	AC,ST	8.50
	Death Gate	Legend	AD	8.50
86	FX Fighter	GTE Entertainment	AC	8.46
87	1942 Pacific Air War	MicroProse	SI	8.45
88	Apache	Interactive Magic	SI	8.43
	Dark Legions	SSI	AC	8.43
90	Hardball 5	Accolade	SP	8.42
	Stonekeep	Interplay	RP	8.42
	Lords of the Realm	Impressions	ST	8.42
93	The Dig	LucasArts	AD	8.41
94	Sim City CD-ROM	Interplay	ST	8.40
95	Cyclemania	Accolade	AC	8.37
96	You Don't Know Jack	Berkeley Systems	CP	8.32
97	Loderunner	Dynamix	ST	8.31
98	Capitalism	Interactive Magic	ST	8.29
	Romance of Three Kingdoms III	Koei	ST	8.29
100	Celtic Tales	Koei	ST	8.28

Games on unnumbered lines have scores equal to the line above. ★ = Top game of type. Red = New Game, AD = Adventure, RP = Role Playing, SI = Simulation/ Space Combat, ST = Strategy, WG = Wargame, AC = Action, SP = Sports, CP = Classic/Puzzle. Games are retired after two years and become eligible for the Hall of Fame.

What's the Deal With... Dumb Ads?



With all due apologies to the one true God of Late Night, I thought I might borrow one of his shticks to focus a baleful eye on some of the idiocy that passes as advertising in our industry.

First off, I'd like to pop into the Ridiculous Claims Department and challenge the odd blurb I've seen lately. From the OUTPOST FOR WIN 95 ad of a few months back we have the proclamation: "THE MOST POPULAR SPACE STRATEGY GAME EVER...!" Um, excuse me Sierra: though I have enjoyed many of your games, somebody needs a slap for OK'ing this one. OUTPOST is not the most popular strategy game ever, unless you think the number of returned boxes and refund demands are a sign of popularity. And just lately, Origin stepped on its own toes by using a quote proclaiming that CYBERMAGE is better than their very own SYSTEM SHOCK. Sorry boys, but this one is only true if you think SVGA is the only important part of a game. And a little reality check for Microsoft—no matter how many pages you use for an ad, FURY3 is still a weak game.

The winner in the "Thing I am getting real tired of seeing" category: blood! Especially on live models. I realize that severed limbs and torn spines are all the rage with our psyche-blasted youth these days, but let's give it a rest, eh? Gore on the ad copy won't make EXPECT NO MERCY from Microforum any less of a tedious MORTAL KOMBAT clone. And maybe WIPEOUT might sell if there were a single picture of the damn game on the ad, instead of Brother & Sister BrainDead bleeding all over themselves.

And just because you dress up a brutal concept doesn't make it any more appealing, as you can see in the new artsy, Gothic/Nihilist ads id and MORTAL KOMBAT 3 are using. Guess what, folks: even a game as gory as DOOM is theoretically about living, or at least survival. I was under the delusion that I was blowing away demons because they wanted to kill me and ravage my world—silly me! Now I understand it all, thanks to your Goth-freakazoid ad people, who have carefully explained in the most pretentious terms that my gameplay is simply another act of Death Worship.

Of course, how can I mention depraved violence-worship without a few words about the ad I loathe the most. It's the two-page spread using the stars'n'bars and personal freedom to push the "Director's Cut" of the repulsive NIGHT TRAP. Now, regardless of my views on censorship and Congressmen, I found the idea that the public was going to have to suffer from another round of this truly awful game far worse. Other than serving as an early warning of everything that was bad about multimedia, NIGHT TRAP served little purpose other than providing a way to shock your parents; but now Digital Pictures informs us that you'd have to be a bi-focal wearing suit not to get a kick out of this little piece of depravity. Gosh, guys, thanks for pointing that out. I guess it's unpatriotic if I don't rush out and get your game so I can watch a few teen girls get slaughtered while I go through the motions of saving them.

> **"I realize that severed limbs and torn spines are all the rage these days, but let's give it a rest, eh?"**

For the sake of my own and my fellow gamer's peace of mind, let me suggest three simple rules for computer game ads.

Martin's Laws of Advertising

1) No more body parts or excessive, juvenile gore. Keep that stuff for the Nintendo mags where the readers are hyperkinetic enough to let primary colors like red distract them from the fact they are getting excited over another version of the same game they already own.

2) No more cheesecake shots of women unless they are actually in the bloody game.

3) If you do not have a screenshot or even an art background from your game yet to put in the ad, you probably shouldn't be trying to make an ad in the first place.

There, that wasn't so bad, was it? So please, ad-kids, before we are so embarrased by our hobby that we order games in brown wrappers... can't you just clean up your act?

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